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BOTTICELLI

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From the painting by Botticelli, in the possession of
Mrs. J. L. Gardner, Boston, Mass.

BOTTICELLI

BY
A. STREETER



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PREFACE

I N attempting to treat of Botticelli's works in a chronological order, I feel that I have undertaken a somewhat venturesome task. All the more so as I have no fresh documentary evidence to bring forward in support of the order in which I have here placed them.

Some system of classification was, however, indispensable; and I have been induced to adopt a chronological system because it seems to me that a classification according to *period* (though in the case of this artist's works it is beset with difficulties) is clearer and more critical than a classification according to *subject*. The latter plan—which has been followed by several of Botticelli's biographers, who have dealt with his pictures under the headings of religious works, allegorical works, historical works, portraits, etc.—is attended by serious disadvantages. It obliges the writer to treat of early works side by side with late ones; to overlook all the affinities of type, style, and feeling which link certain pictures together as productions of the same period; and to relinquish the effort to reconstruct the artist's life-work in the order of its natural development.

Although there is as yet no direct clue to the dates of the majority of Botticelli's pictures, yet the dates of a few of them have been ascertained either by docu-

mentary, or very strong circumstantial, evidence. There is every reason to believe, for example, that the *St. Sebastian* belongs to the year 1473 and the *Pallas* to 1480; and we know that the Sistine frescoes were executed in 1481-1483, the "Bardi" Altarpiece in 1485, the Lemmi frescoes in 1486, and *The Nativity* in 1500. These works act as landmarks which, appearing at intervals through almost the whole of Botticelli's artistic career, indicate the distinguishing characteristics of his various phases of development. By comparing the remainder of his works both with one another and with those already dated, noting their analogies with the latter and classifying them accordingly, we are able approximately to group them into periods, and to form some idea of the order of their execution. A chronological method, therefore, has the advantage of necessitating a close study of the works not only in themselves, but in their relation to one another as the products of successive stages in the artist's development; and it aims at following step by step the course of his career. For these reasons I have, though with much diffidence, ventured to adopt it.

I think I may claim to have read every important contribution to Botticellian literature (as well as some unimportant ones); and while I gratefully acknowledge my immense indebtedness to many of the writings in question, I have not followed any one writer entirely. Wherever I have differed from acknowledged authorities (who are not always agreed amongst themselves) I have endeavoured to state clearly my reasons for doing so, leaving it to the Reader to judge what these reasons may be worth.

The works from which I have received the most assist-

ance are the following: (1st) as a general survey of Botticelli's art, the admirable "Life" by Signor Supino, although in several important instances I have not been able to accept this writer's chronology of the pictures; (2nd) as "literary" criticism, the charming essay by Walter Pater, who, notwithstanding all the opposition his interpretations have called forth, has, I think, penetrated more deeply than any other critic into the spirit of Botticelli's art, especially in its relation to religious subjects; (3rd) as "artistic" criticism, the invaluable and all too brief pages which Mr. Berenson has devoted to Botticelli.

To these must be added Herr Steinmann's scholarly studies of the Sistine frescoes, and many important critical hints derived from the writings of Dr. Richter, Dr. Julius Meyer, Count Plunkett, Mr. Horne, and some others.

The chief material, however, from which the following pages have been compiled, has been supplied by the pictures themselves. With very few exceptions I have visited every picture described; and a long residence in Italy has given me the opportunity of becoming intimately acquainted with Botticelli's works in Italian galleries. The opinions here expressed, whether they be in agreement or in disagreement with the views of other critics, have, in almost every case, been formed by me in the presence of the pictures themselves; and I advance them as the result of careful and independent study.

A. STREETER.

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BOTTICELLI

CHAPTER I

HIS LIFE, MASTERS, AND ENVIRONMENT

A LESSANDRO, called "after our custom" Sandro, was the fourth and youngest son of Mariano di Vanni Filipepi, a Florentine tanner. He is generally supposed to have been born some time in 1447, as, in a fiscal census paper ("denunzia dei beni") signed by his father in 1480, he is described as being then thirty-three years of age.¹ Recent researches, however, tend to show that the date of his birth must be placed three years earlier, namely *c.* 1444.² The name of Botticelli, which distinguished him through life, and after, he seems to have derived from his elder brother Giovanni—nearly twenty years his senior—who for some unexplained reason had acquired the nickname of Il Botticello, or "the little cask."

¹ This document is published in Gaye's "Carteggio."

² Mr. Herbert Horne has recently announced the discovery of documentary evidence (which he has not yet published) that in February, 1458, Botticelli was "thirteen years of age, in feeble health, and still at school." *Vide* "Souvenirs of Sandro Botticelli" ("Revue Archéologique," July, 1901).

The Filipepi family were well-to-do burghers, and Sandro's father, Vasari tells us, brought him up with care, and gave him the education that was usual with boys of his class before they chose a calling. But though very quick at learning, he showed a marked aversion to study, and "would not take any pleasure in reading, writing, or accounts,"—a disposition of mind that is hardly in itself sufficiently abnormal to warrant Vasari's epithet of "eccentric." Messer Mariano, however, seems to have been much perturbed at his son's idleness; "and in despair handed him over to a very competent master in goldsmith-work, hoping that the boy might take to this art." As it is known that Antonio Filipepi, Mariano's second son, was at this time practising as a goldsmith in Florence, it is possible that the "very competent master" was none other than Sandro's own brother. The venture, however, proved a failure, and once more Sandro failed to do what was expected of him.

A "constant intercourse" existed at this period between artists of all kinds; and at the goldsmith's shop the boy was thrown into contact with some painters, in whose company he discovered his true vocation. He "became enamoured of painting"; and at once intimated to his father that he intended to devote his life to this art. A certain stubborn determination to go his own way at all costs seems to have been one of his lifelong characteristics. It must apparently have already manifested itself at this early age, for Messer Mariano, "knowing the force of his son's inclinations," meekly acquiesced in his impetuous decision, and without more ado transferred him from the goldsmith's *bottega* to that of the "most excellent painter," Fra Filippo Lippi.

The Frate was now at Prato, where between the years 1453-1465 he was engaged—working intermittently according to his wont—upon the decoration of the cathedral choir with scenes in fresco from the lives of SS. Stephen and John Baptist. To Prato, therefore, Sandro went somewhere about the year 1459-1460, though the date cannot be fixed with any exactitude. At the beginning of 1458 he seems to have been still at school, battling with feeble health and with the uncongenial task of learning to read and write. There are indications in his art that he must have remained long enough with the goldsmith to acquire some practical knowledge of goldsmith's work. The end of 1459, or beginning of 1460, may therefore be assigned as the probable date of his entrance into Fra Filippo's *bottega*. Cennino Cennini tells us that the usual age at which boys destined for an art career commenced their apprenticeship was between their tenth and twelfth year. Assuming that Sandro was born in 1444, he would have been in his sixteenth year when he went to Fra Filippo, and he therefore started his career at an unusually late age—a fact which may explain Messer Mariano's many perturbations on his account.

But he soon made up for lost time. Directly he found himself in a congenial atmosphere he set to work diligently, and "gave himself up entirely to the art he had chosen." And, as Vasari goes on to tell us, "he so effectively followed the instructions and imitated the manner of his master, that Fra Filippo became much attached to him, and took such pains with his training that he rapidly attained a degree of proficiency which no one would have predicted for him."

Botticelli was undoubtedly fortunate in his first master; for in no other contemporary workshop would he have found himself in conditions so favourable to the development of much that was most characteristic of his genius. Fra Filippo was the last of the older generation of devotional painters; and though he brought many innovations into his treatment of religious subjects, and was much captivated by the goodly things of earth, yet in the main he belonged to the Idealistic, as opposed to the Naturalistic, school, and was almost untouched by the prevailing passion for scientific research. Under his tuition Sandro would have been confirmed in the strongly idealistic bent of his own nature, and equipped to resist the naturalistic influences by which later on he was surrounded.

At the time of the boy's arrival at Prato, the frescoes on the left side of the choir, illustrating the life of St. John Baptist, must have been nearly, if not quite, completed; and the Frate, assisted by Fra Diamante, was probably at work on the scenes from the life of St. Stephen. We can imagine what an effect these masterpieces must have had on the young enthusiast. As he watched the bare choir wall gradually growing into scenes of majestic life, he must not only have acquired valuable technical knowledge, but his imagination must have been powerfully stirred by the true poetic quality which these frescoes unquestionably possess. The note of human interest and emotion which the Frate was one of the first to emphasize in painting must have found a responsive echo in the pupil's natural tendencies to subjective and emotional expression. And it may be, as Professor Ulmann has remarked, that in contemplating such

motives as the *Dance of Salome*, Sandro first discovered where the pre-eminent qualities of his own genius lay.

Are there any grounds for the assertion—seriously made by more than one writer—that Botticelli's art was *derived* from that of Fra Filippo, that he was the "continuator" of the Frate's style, and that but for Fra Filippo there would have been no Botticelli?

Certain reminiscences of Fra Filippo do undoubtedly appear in some of Sandro's earlier pictures; and it is possible that some motives he fully developed may be traced to a germ in the Frate's work. He also resembled his master in the preponderance he gave to the expression of emotional over physical aspects of human energy—this being a common characteristic that separated both from the Naturalistic school. But beyond this there is little or no connection between the two. A comparison of their best work reveals differences so radical and fundamental as to preclude all possibility that the art of the one was in any sense a product of the other. All that is most distinctive, all that we most prize, in Botticelli's art lies not only outside the sphere of the Frate's accomplishment, but beyond the range of his discernible aims. On the other hand, Sandro deliberately discarded all emulation of many of the most characteristic excellences of Fra Filippo's work. The breadth of treatment, the virile dignity, the simple Masaccian grandeur which are salient features of the Prato frescoes are conspicuous in Botticelli's more complex art only by their absence. Fra Filippo was intensely concrete and direct; Sandro was abstract, visionary, and elaborate. The one, at his best, was a great master of representation and expression, the other, a unique genius in decoration.

Botticelli's art, both in its perfections and its imperfections, bears the impress of one of the strongest and most independent individualities of the Early Renaissance. Although to the creative power of a great original genius he added the receptiveness of a profoundly poetical nature, yet in his very receptiveness he was intensely opinionated and selective. He took from others only what he was able to fully assimilate, and by assimilating, to transform into an integral part of his own highly distinctive personality. After his apprenticeship to Fra Filippo, he was in turn influenced by the Pollajuoli, in a lesser degree by Verrocchio, and powerfully, though indirectly, by Ghirlandajo and Leonardo. But this very susceptibility to influence prevented the permanence of any one influence in particular. He was a born leader, not a follower; the founder of a school, the inventor of a style, not the "continuator" or the developer of any existing style.

Sandro's real indebtedness to his first master—apart from instruction in the practical business of his art—lies not in the acquirement of any tendency or style, but in the facility afforded him for discovering where his own tendencies pointed. The atmosphere of the Prato workshop was peculiarly adapted to foster and develop the boy's natural and instinctive proclivities. Under Fra Filippo's guidance he easily found his own way in art. Had he started his career under the auspices of a "scientific" painter, he might, for a time at least, have missed it.

There is no evidence as to how long Sandro remained with Fra Filippo. The choir frescoes were finished in 1465; but the Frate continued to reside at Prato for

nearly three years after their completion. In 1467 he was called to Spoleto to decorate the cathedral of that city; but from the record of a payment made to him the following year at Prato, it appears that he did not obey this summons till 1468. The usual term of an art-apprenticeship was twelve years. We know from Vasari that Fra Filippo had become much attached to Sandro,¹ who was making great progress under his tuition. It therefore seems unlikely that the young apprentice would have left the Prato workshop until its break-up through the Frate's approaching departure compelled him to do so. As he certainly did not accompany his master to Spoleto, it is probable that somewhere about the end of 1467 or beginning of 1468 the two parted company and Sandro returned to Florence.

At this period the two principal *bottege* of Florence were those of Andrea Verrocchio and the brothers Piero and Antonio Pollajuolo. Both, especially the latter, were centres of scientific experiment and research. Evidences of Verrocchian influence in some of Botticelli's early pictures have raised the question as to whether he studied under this master. But Verrocchio was such a dominant personality in the contemporary art-world of Florence, that any young painter might have been influenced by him without actually becoming his scholar. There is far more probability in the supposition that on his return from Prato, Sandro entered the workshop of

¹ A daughter born, 1465, to Fra Filippo by Lucrezia Buti (whose connection with the painter had been legalized by Pope Pius II.), was baptized by the name of Alessandra. It is possible that the choice of this name was a compliment to the Frate's favourite pupil.

the Pollajuoli in the capacity of an assistant, as a year or so later we find him working in collaboration with them. In 1469 the Pollajuoli had been commissioned to paint a series of panels illustrative of the Virtues for the Mercatanzia, or Tribunal of Commerce, of Florence. In 1470 they confided the execution of one of these panels—that representing *Fortitude*—to Botticelli. As the Pollajuoli were the heads of a very important *bottega*, they would hardly have invited the assistance of one who was not of their own immediate following, and the fact points strongly to the conclusion that at this time Botticelli must have been working in their regular employment. The very marked indications, too, of Pollajuolesque influence in all his early pictures are a further confirmation of his close association with these artists.

In the neighbourhood of the Pollajuoli, Botticelli found himself in an atmosphere of uncompromising naturalism. Safeguarded both by his training under Fra Filippo and by his own aesthetic instinct from abandoning himself to a scientific conception of art, it was to his advantage that his education should have been completed in a workshop where he was compelled to devote himself to anatomical and technical studies. Under the immediate direction of the Pollajuoli and the all-pervading influence of Verrocchio he would have learned to aim at the *accurate delineation of objective things*, to occupy himself with problems of perspective and foreshortening, the study of the nude, and that supreme object of contemporary effort—the correct representation of life in action. In such exercises he would have qualified himself for the execution of those etherealized versions of movement which are the unrivalled achievement of his art. Thus the

conditions that now surrounded him at Florence supplied much that had been wanting in the more conventional methods of the Prato workshop, and the influence of the Naturalists modifying, and modified by, the previous influence of Fra Filippo, prepared the way for the development of his own individuality.

The next notice we have of Sandro is in 1472, when he takes charge of Fra Filippo's young son, Filippino. The Frate had died at Spoleto in 1469, and Fra Diamante, acting either in obedience to, or on his own interpretation of, his master's wishes, confides Filippino, now fourteen years of age, to Sandro's care and upbringing. That he was able to take a pupil implies that Sandro was now his own master. In the "denunzia dei beni" of 1480 he is described as living and working at home with his father. And it is probable that eight years earlier—in 1472, when he took the young Filippino—he was already established in his own workshop under the paternal roof.

The next year, 1473—the date is supplied by the anonymous writer of the "Codex Gaddiano"—he received his first important commission, and this from no less a personage than Lorenzo the Magnificent. The picture in question is the *St. Sebastian* now in the Berlin Gallery; and it was ordered by Lorenzo for the Church of Sta. Maria Maggiore. To have attracted the notice of Lorenzo was already an important step towards fame, for the Medici were not only liberal, but also keenly discriminative, in their patronage of the fine arts, and their recognition was not only a passport to success, but a very trustworthy testimony to an artist's genuine merit.

In 1474 Botticelli was called to Pisa to collaborate

as it seems, with Benozzo Gozzoli in the decoration of the Campo Santo. The invitation was supplemented with a condition which shows that though the young artist's reputation had spread beyond the bounds of his native city, it was not as yet sufficiently established to inspire full confidence in his skill. Before commencing any work in the Campo Santo, he was required to paint a trial picture of the Assumption; and if this test satisfied the *Operai* of the cathedral, he was to receive the commission of the more important work. This trial picture, however, appears never to have been finished. Between the July and September of 1474, Botticelli's name frequently figures in the registers of the Pisan Cathedral as the recipient of sums of money for ultramarine he had ordered from Florence. But as the entries suddenly cease, with no mention of a price paid for the finished picture, it would seem that the work was unsatisfactory either to the artist or his employers, and that the engagement terminated. This one check in his otherwise successful career appears to have had a very important effect on Botticelli's subsequent work. He was not a man to brook failure, and on his return from Pisa he applied himself to his art, not only with surprising industry but with an evident determination to make his mastery recognized. His pictures of the next six years established his fame among his contemporaries, and are amongst the monuments that perpetuate it to posterity.

In the autumn of 1474 Sandro seems to have been again at work for the Medici—this time for Giuliano, Lorenzo's younger brother. Amongst the list of his works enumerated by Vasari, the old chronicler makes

mention of a "Pallas standing on an emblematical device of a burning bush." When Botticelli's famous picture of *Pallas and the Centaur* was discovered in 1895, an attempt was made to identify it with the *Pallas* mentioned by Vasari. But the descriptions did not tally. The subject has quite recently been elucidated by Signor Poggi.¹ In the January of 1475 a great *giostra*, or tournament, was held in Florence, in which all the chief citizens took part, and of which Giuliano—the hero of contemporary poets and the idol of the people—was proclaimed victor. All the combatants were preceded in the lists by a standard-bearer carrying a banner with their heraldic, or some other emblematical, device. It is known that several of the leading artists of Florence—Verrocchio among the number—were employed to paint these banners. Signor Poggi has come upon a manuscript in the Magliabecchiano Library in which the whole pageantry of the *giostra* is minutely described; and the description given of Giuliano's banner exactly coincides with Vasari's account of Botticelli's *Pallas*. The inference is clear. Furthermore, in an inventory of the Palazzo Medici,² dated 1512, and apparently copied from one compiled at Lorenzo's death in 1492, mention is made of a "panno," or cloth, measuring 4 *braccia* by 2, with a figure of "Pa[llade] . . . holding a shield and lance, painted by Sandro Botticelli." This work—which cannot be Botticelli's *Pallas with the Centaur*, as the measurements do not correspond, and in the picture Pallas carries no shield—was probably identical with the painting described by Vasari, and was none

¹ Vide "L'Arte," March-April, 1902.

² Published in Müntz's "Collections des Medicis."

other than Giuliano's banner in the *giostra* (as the word "panno" seems to confirm), which though it has since been either destroyed or lost, was still in the possession of the Medici in 1512.

As a result of such commissions as this, and others which were to follow, Botticelli would have been brought into close contact with the princely ruler of Florence and the illustrious circle which surrounded him. Presided over by one of the most commanding figures of the Florentine Renaissance, the court of the Magnificent was not only a scene of sumptuous festivity and of constant political intrigue, but it was also a centre of learning and culture to which all the most brilliant talent of the period naturally gravitated. To his genius for statecraft Lorenzo added a faultless taste in letters, music, and the fine arts, a scholarly knowledge of classic literature, a student's interest in ancient philosophies, and a poetic gift that at times rises to true creative inspiration. Gay and lavish, he entertained his friends at sumptuous banquets modelled on those of Imperial Rome; he took part in the revels of the carnival masquerades, for which many of his songs were composed; and he diverted his people with gorgeous spectacles and pageants conducted after the manner of the old Roman "trionfi." Around this truly "magnificent" leader was collected a group of men, any one of whom would have added lustre to an ordinary court. Among his intimates were Agnolo Poliziano, one of the foremost classic scholars of Italy, whose chief title to fame rests on his exquisite verses in the vernacular which laid the foundation of modern Italian poetry; the brothers Pulci, both brilliant poets; Cristoforo Landini,

leader of the Dantesque revival ; Marsilio Ficino, head of the Platonic Academy, simple Catholic priest, and renowned Humanist philosopher ; and Pico, Count of Mirandola, apologist of the Hellenic divinities, learned student of the Jewish Kabbalah, and penitent of Savonarola—who devoted all his best energy to the reconciliation of the ancient faiths with the doctrines of Christianity.

The Classic Revival was now at its height, and not only dominated the intellect, but penetrated to the life, of the period, and brought an element of splendour and refinement, and also of affectation, into the taste and manners of the cultured classes. The antique had become a fashion as well as a supreme ideal. Conversation, epistolary correspondence, even sermons, teemed with classic allusions. Poetry, and literature in general, was studded with classic imagery, strangely blended with relics of chivalric sentiment and mediaeval fancy. The forces of nature, the passions and energies of humanity, were personified under the resuscitated figures of the ancient gods. The sun once more had become Phoebus ; Venus was once more the acknowledged sovereign of a kingdom where she had never ceased to rule ; nymphs, fauns, genii, once more peopled the woods and the olive-groves, while zephyrs swayed their branches. Across the mysterious gloom of mediaevalism Italy strained eager eyes towards the golden vista of antiquity, and beheld a vision at once dimmed and transfigured by the mists of intervening ages.

Such were the envioning influences under which Botticelli lived and worked, and which permeate much of his art. In the company of cultivated associates the tanner's son, who in his youth had shirked the most

elementary schooling, amply made up for the deficiencies of his early education. Whether or no he ever attained to any first-hand knowledge of classic authors may be doubted. But his art clearly shows that he was thoroughly conversant with contemporary literature, and through it acquired some knowledge of the classic sources from which so much of it was inspired. Gifted with an exceptionally responsive nature, possessed of a keenly analytic and meditative habit of mind, he entered, as no other artist of the period entered, into the spirit of Early Renaissance culture, and his art became "a mirror reflecting all the tendencies of his day."

The years 1474-1480, years of a tacit rivalry with Ghirlandajo, were years also, there is reason to believe, of a close friendship with Leonardo. Both exercised in different ways an influence upon Botticelli's art, although this influence did not in the case of either take the form of a direct following. His rivalry with Ghirlandajo, with whom at various periods of his life he was brought into competitive collaboration, seems to have had a highly stimulative effect upon Botticelli's genius, and to have spurred him to do his utmost to prove his superiority, though not so much by imitating his rival's style as by excelling in a style of his own. On one occasion, however, in the *Uffizi Adoration of the Magi*, this spirit of emulation led him to swerve somewhat from his natural tendencies, and tempted him to measure his strength (most successfully, as the result shows) with the champions of realism. The influence of the Friend was more subtle than that of the Rival. Although there is little in Botticelli's art—if we except the type of his Spring Maiden, possibly the head of his

Magnificat Madonna, and the backgrounds of some of his later pictures—which clearly points to a Leonardesque derivation, yet the extent of his indebtedness to Leonardo can hardly be measured by such tangible effects as these. Botticelli enjoys the distinction of being the only contemporary painter to whom Leonardo in his “Treatise on Painting” has alluded by name; and this in terms that imply intimacy and regard: “il nostro Botticciello.” And though he was an older man and at this period a more practised artist than Leonardo—who had not as yet completed his apprenticeship to Verrocchio—yet the intercourse of these two commanding artistic personalities can hardly have been without important effects upon the development of both. In the “infinite” aspirations of Leonardo Botticelli would have found much that coincided with his own highest, and still undefined, aims. The influence of the inquiring, insatiable spirit of Verrocchio’s young pupil would have acted as a potent counter-force to the influence of Ghirlandajo’s facile successes, and it may well be that the perfect balance of Leonardo’s work in which, even in these early days, “science and art were never separated,” helped to confirm Botticelli in his opposition to the purely scientific tendencies of the dominant school.

To the year 1480 belongs the “denunzia dei beni” already alluded to, a document which throws some light on the mutual relations of the Filipepi family. In it Mariano describes himself as eighty-six years of age, retired from work, and the owner of several *poderi*, or small farmed lands. With him lives his eldest son Giovanni, father of a numerous family, who conducts business as an agent, and is the virtual head of the

Filipepi house. The second son, Antonio, fifty-one years of age, and trained as a goldsmith, now lives at Bologna as a vender of books and manuscripts. Simone, the third son, is at Naples, and follows no special calling. Sandro, a painter, aged thirty-three,¹ lives at home with his father and works *when he so chooses* ("quando vuole"). This phrase rather bears out Vasari's statement as to the "time he wasted when he *would* not paint," thus bringing his affairs into "infinite disorder." His habits of work seem to have been erratic and irregular, and in attempting to reconstruct the chronological order of his pictures, we are met by periods of astonishing industry alternating with years that are almost a blank. Possessed by, rather than possessing, his genius, he was governed by his moods, and waited for the moment of inspiration with a recklessness of financial consequences which his biographer finds frequent occasion to deplore.

In the December of 1480 Botticelli, now in the height of his fame, was summoned to Rome by Pope Sixtus IV. to collaborate with Ghirlandajo, Perugino, and Cosimo Rosselli, in the decoration in fresco of the newly erected Sistine Chapel. It is probable that he started for Rome early in 1481, as it appears from the record of a contract dated October 27th, 1481, that he and his collaborators had then already been some time at work. The entire work, of which Botticelli seems to have had the general direction—though his actual contribution to it consisted only of three fresco-scenes—extended over a period of two years and was finally completed in the August of 1483, when the chapel was opened on the

¹ Or thirty-six, according to Mr. Horne's computation.

Feast of the Assumption. Vasari tells us that Botticelli gained great renown in Rome—above that of any of his collaborators—and that he received large sums of money from the Holy Father in recognition of his services. With his habitual recklessness he soon squandered all his earnings; and when he had spent everything he hastened back to Florence, where, entirely neglecting his own art, he “wasted much time” in studying and commenting the “Divina Commedia.”

This statement of Vasari's, however, as applied to the years immediately succeeding his visit to Rome, is not borne out by established facts. To the Eighties belong some of Botticelli's greatest masterpieces and some of his most important commissions. On his way back from Rome he seems to have halted at Volterra, where, in conjunction with Ghirlandajo, he executed some frescoes at Lorenzo's villa Lo Spedaletto. These works, mentioned by Vasari, and to which Mr. Horne has recently found further documentary allusion, are now completely effaced.

On his return to Florence, probably in the first half of 1484, he was again at work for Lorenzo. A little later he executed commissions for the Bardi and the Tornabuoni families, besides painting several large religious pictures. In 1487 he painted a *tondo* for the audience hall of the Magistrato dei Massari, a work difficult to identify, for though the *tondo* now in the Ambrosiana at Milan belongs, I think, approximately to this period, it can hardly be the work in question. On the 5th January, 1491, he sat on a commission to judge competitive designs for the façade of the cathedral. In May of the same year he received an order to decorate with

mosaic, again in collaboration with Ghirlandajo, the Chapel of S. Zanobi in the cathedral, a work which, however, seems never to have been carried out.

Botticelli's life as an artist was now drawing to a close. Early in the Nineties a new and imperious influence dominated him. In the August of 1489, Savonarola had made his first great success from the pulpit of St. Mark's; and for eight years his voice ruled the conscience of Florence, and his commanding personality possessed the imagination of the Florentines. Botticelli, ever impressionable and enthusiastic, became one of his most devoted adherents; and, Vasari tells us, he identified himself so completely with the great Dominican's cause, and adopted so rigidly the rule of the *Piagnoni*, that he entirely gave up painting, and would have died of starvation but for the assistance of Lorenzo and other generous friends. The latter part of this statement cannot be accepted unreservedly, for a declaration of property, dated 1498, is still preserved, which shows that in that year Botticelli was living with his brother Simone and his nephew Mariano (Antonio's son), in the house of the Benincasa at Florence, and that he was joint owner of a *podere* situated outside the Porta S. Frediano. He must therefore have had some means of subsistence apart from the generosity of friends. That he continued to enjoy the favour of the Medici is, however, evident from the fact that in 1496 Michael Angelo, desiring a recommendation to Lorenzo di Pier Francesco dei Medici, has recourse to Botticelli's influence to address a letter to this prince.

Vasari's assertion that under Savonarola's influence Botticelli abandoned painting seems in the main to be

correct. The later years of the Nineties were comparatively unproductive, and no masterpiece can be assigned to this period. It was probably now and not, as Vasari says, immediately on his return from Rome, that Botticelli became absorbed in the study of Dante, and to these years, I think, must be attributed the majority of his illustrations of the "*Divina Commedia*." It is also probable that during some part, at least, of the Nineties he retained the direction of his large *bottega*, and supervised—perhaps to some extent participated in—the execution of many *Botticellesque* works, distinguished no longer by the master's inimitable artistic touch, but by their depth of religious fervour. In 1500 his genius once more and for the last time asserts itself in the beautiful little *Nativity* of the National Gallery—the only picture he appears to have ever signed and dated.

From 1500 to 1510 his life is a complete blank. The man survived the painter by ten years; a feeble old man, according to Vasari, bent and decrepit, making his way at the last painfully on crutches. Overtaken by physical infirmity, oppressed, as it would seem, by religious melancholy, yet consoled perhaps by his studies of Dante—visionary, communing with visionary—he "passes away from men's sight" in an inactive retirement that contrasts with the inspired old age of Michael Angelo, and the sudden death which snatched Raphael in his prime from an unfinished masterpiece.

The last notice we have of him is that in 1503 he formed part of a commission chosen to select a suitable site for Michael Angelo's *David*. On a May day in 1510 he died, and was buried in the Church of Ognisanti, in the vault of the Filipepi family.

According to his biographers—Vasari and the anonymous writer of the “Codex Gaddiano”—Botticelli seems to have been “un uomo molto piacevole,” possessed of a kindly and genial temperament, and taking a fatherly interest in all young students who were genuinely devoted to art. He was also somewhat facetious, a lover of practical jokes, as one or two (rather unimportant) anecdotes recorded of him tend to prove. When Vasari wrote he was still remembered as a reckless, headstrong and whimsical personality of rather eccentric habits and tastes, amongst the latter of which the Anonymous includes a confirmed horror of matrimony.

During his lifetime he gained great fame, and for many years after his death artists vied with one another to possess his drawings. As the ideals of the Early Renaissance gave place to the facile accomplishment of later centuries, and the artistic sense of Italy slowly declined, Botticelli and his work faded from memory and sank into complete neglect. In a decree of the Grand Duke Ferdinand I., dating from the beginning of the *seicento*, which prohibits the removal of works of art from the city, Botticelli's name is not even mentioned, though the list includes such minor artists as Rosso Fiorentino, Daniele da Volterra, and Perino del Vaga. So recently as 1870, when Mr. Pater wrote his charming essay on Botticelli, it is as a “secondary painter” and almost apologetically that he refers to him. It has been reserved to even later criticism to rediscover his genius, and perhaps for the first time to estimate it at its full value. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that at the present day Botticelli inspires more interest than any other artist of Italy.



CHAPTER II

CHARACTERISTICS OF HIS ART

IN order to form a general idea of the art of Botticelli, it is necessary to bear in mind the somewhat complex temperament with which the artist appears to have been endowed. To his pre-eminent genius as a painter, he added not only a profoundly poetical nature, but an intellectuality keenly introspective and analytic. He did not cultivate the versatility of artistic gifts which was common among the artists of Florence, many of whom were sculptors and architects as well as painters, some of whom were poets and musicians as well as plastic artists.

On the contrary, though possessing a versatility of artistic temperament, a richness of imagination far exceeding that of the majority of his contemporaries, Botticelli, unlike them, practised only one branch of art. In him the power of vision absorbed every other faculty; and whatever he possessed of poetry and intellectuality found its only expression in the terms of painting. As a result, his art is often intensely subjective and meditative in character; and in many of its phases it is charged with spiritual significance as the depository of poetical musings and of philosophic questionings.

These phases constitute only one aspect of his artistic activity. Although the poet and the thinker were potent forces in Botticelli, forces which demanded and received an outlet in his art, yet the artist in him was the strongest force of all. There are periods—the periods of his greatest achievement—when the artist, as if resenting the importunities of the poet and the thinker, subjugated every other impulse, and claimed all the creative energies of the painter for a purpose exclusively artistic. Thus, in his most consummate moments, Botticelli has given us an art more independent of all didactic, expressive, or representative intention—an art more nearly approaching to “absolute art,” than anything which had been done in Italy before him, or than most things that have been done in Europe since.

As a consequence of this twofold aspect of his work, there has been a tendency among Botticelli's critics to divide themselves into two camps: on the one hand there are those who, attracted by the profound idealism of some of his pictures, regard him as the most subjective of painters, and have dealt with his art only from a “literary” standpoint; on the other hand there are those who, impressed by his genius as a decorator, have viewed all his work only from an artistic standpoint. While the latter neglect the interest which attaches to many of Botticelli's pictures as expressions of Early Renaissance thought and feeling—the former often miss all that is really most distinctive in his genius and his art.

In what does this distinctiveness lie? What is it which gives Botticelli his unique position among the painters not only of Italy, but of Europe? The answer

may be defined : that he was the first painter who valued his medium more for what it *is* than for what it can *denote*.

To explain. Taking line, light, colour, form, as being the integral elements of a painter's medium, he may employ them, broadly speaking, for three distinct purposes : firstly, for the expression of ideas or sentiments ; secondly, for the imitative representation of actual objects ; thirdly, for the sake solely of their intrinsic decorative quality, for the aesthetic charm of line, light, colour, form, valued for what these are in themselves, irrespective of anything they may express or represent. In the finest art these three aims are never wholly dissociated ; but the predominance of one or other gives a definite character to particular periods and schools of art production.

Italian painting in its earliest manifestations appears as an instrument in the hands of the Church ; and, continuing the work of mosaic, it aimed at supplying an external imagery for religious ideas. The early painters were intent on embodying the sacred narratives, the doctrines, and the faith of Christianity, and on realizing as far as might be the vision of a spiritual world. They were occupied with a subject-matter exclusively religious and ideal ; and their work, hampered by technical incompetence, and dealing mainly with supernatural conceptions, was to a great extent symbolical in character and conventional in form. Gradually as exercise in their art opened out the resources of their medium, painters sought to approximate their imagery more and more to the reality of life. While still treating only of sacred themes, they emphasized the human side somewhat at

the expense of the divine. Sentiments within the ordinary range of human experience were now freely introduced and rendered with increasing intimacy and force, till in the middle of the *quattrocento* we find Fra Filippo directing all his most masterly effects to the expression of specific human emotions—human sorrow, human affection, the joyousness of human childhood. While remaining ideal and imaginative in character, art had thus transferred her sphere from heaven to earth, and Symbolism was succeeded by Expression.

Already in the first half of the century another school was rising into existence, which substituted observation for imagination, which occupied itself with physical rather than with spiritual effects, and preferred the object to the idea. Since art by her power of symbolism could penetrate to the realm of the spirit, and by her power of expression could conquer the domain of the human heart, so now by the cultivation of her imitative and representative powers she should extend her dominion over the whole visible creation, and subdue the concrete facts of nature and life. The great aim of the Naturalists was to bring their medium into touch with actuality, to convert it into objective realities, to transform it into living flesh and blood, "quivering nerve and straining muscle," into effects of distance and atmosphere, into the semblance of physical energy and movement. As the imagination of religious contemplation had previously given place to the imagination of human sympathy, so now this in its turn gave place to accurate observation of the phenomena of material existence. The world without obscured the world within; and poetry made way for science.

In the midst of the triumph of naturalism, appears Botticelli taking up a perfectly different attitude towards art, discerning new possibilities in his medium, and acknowledging other responsibilities towards it. The imitative and representative powers of art he entirely disregards except for the purposes of technical study. The expressive powers of art concern him considerably at various periods of his career—when his imagination was dominated by the idealism of his youth, by the humanistic problems which perplexed his maturity, by the religious fervour which possessed his old age. But in his most inspired moments, in those intervals when his art was truest to itself, we find that he handles his medium not as a vehicle of expression, still less as a register of fact, but in reference solely to its inherent decorative qualities. And, developing these qualities for the attainment of a purely aesthetic effect, he values his medium for the abstract beauty essential to it, viewed quite apart from any moral or spiritual significance with which it might accidentally become invested. Thus, what with others was but a means, with him becomes in itself a supreme end.

From the constituent elements of his medium he selects the one that is least representative and most abstract ; and—uncertain in his colouring, often defective in his modelling, and indifferent to effects of light—he becomes a consummate master of *line*, the first great decorative painter of Italy, the father of the aesthetic (as distinguished from the devotional, and from the scientific) school in art.

Dealing with line as a composer deals with the musical scale, he abandons himself to the magic of his material ;

in his hands curve and arabesque acquire a value analogous to that of a chord or a phrase of music, and he treats his subject, as Mr. Berenson says of him, as a "mere libretto." The significance of his art here lies in the form rather than in the subject; and its appeal, like that of music, is addressed to the imagination rather than to the understanding. As in the case of some poetry of which the effect depends on the rhythmical sound of the words rather than on their intelligible meaning, it evokes a mood, compels an emotion, not derivable from the ostensible subject, but directly dependent on the form.

To give an example. Some of Botticelli's literary critics have been puzzled as to what the artist *meant* by such works as *Spring*, *The Birth of Venus*, and the panel known as *Mars and Venus*. They have attempted to *explain* these pictures as illustrations of certain passages in the poems of Lorenzo and Poliziano, and in some cases have even invested them with an added allegorical significance. These explanations, however, are not only in themselves unsatisfactory—because in no single instance has Botticelli followed any poet sufficiently closely to fulfil the requirements of illustration—but they are based on a misinterpretation of the works in question. In searching the recondite they miss what is salient. For as far as the result is indicative of the aim, it seems evident that in each of these, and some analogous, pictures Botticelli *meant* nothing more than to produce (as he has certainly succeeded in producing) a piece of superb lineal decoration, and was untroubled by any desire to convey a literary or allegorical meaning. Wholly possessed by his genius for pure design, he here appears as the least subjective of painters. Occupied

solely with the decorative capabilities of his medium, he was indifferent to the quality of his subject-matter, except in so far as the latter lent itself to the development of the former.

At the same time, it cannot be denied that Botticelli was closely in touch with the great Humanist poets, and that his art, in many of its examples, is permeated with the spirit of Early Renaissance poetry, of which it shares the highly ornate imagery. The new poetry which was now rising up in Italy was itself intensely decorative in character, a poetry of *form* rather than of *sentiment*, and of which all the charm lies in the style rather than in the significance, in the mode of expression rather than in the imaginative value of what is expressed. It is impossible to read the *Stanze* of Poliziano, the "Giostra" of Lucà Pulci, the "Selve" and "L'Ambra" of Lorenzo, without being struck by the general affinity which exists between these works and many of Botticelli's decorative masterpieces. It would seem that our artist's inspiration was throughout more vividly kindled from imaginative than from objective sources, and his responsive nature was keenly susceptible to the influence of contemporary literature. Although none of his pictures, as wholes, can be identified with any particular poetical scene or episode, there is no doubt that many of his decorative motives were originally suggested by poetic images. In transferring the poetic image, however, from the medium of poetry to that of painting, he develops it in reference, not to its verbal meaning, but to its decorative possibilities. Unhampered by any attempt at literal rendering, and acknowledging no responsibilities towards his subject-matter, he freely selects, adapts, elaborates—intent only

on weaving his exquisite combinations of line, and the word-picture, evoking a vision which stirs his creative imagination, becomes but the *point du départ* whence his inspiration takes its flight.

In this qualified sense Botticelli's indebtedness to literature is considerable. Though he far surpassed any of his literary associates in genius, yet his work in decorative painting is to some extent the counterpart of theirs in poetry. Both are outcomes of the classical aspirations of Humanistic culture. Both aim at the liberation of the aesthetic impulse from all subservience either to a didactic intention or a scientific purpose, and at the cultivation of art for art's sake.

It is chiefly in his mythological or "allegorical" pictures—in *The Birth of Venus*, *Spring*, *Pallas*, the Lemmi frescoes—that Botticelli rises to his grandest height of decoration. It is chiefly in his sacred pictures that he has given expression to the subjective moods—now deeply emotional, now meditative and speculative—which at times possessed him. No hard-and-fast line, however, can be drawn. In his best-known religious picture—in *The Madonna of the Magnificat*—all spiritual significance is absorbed in the dominance of a purely aesthetic aim. On the other hand, even in his most decorative work, a vein of deeper meaning steals into the strangely spiritualized type—Madonna-like in its chastened sadness—that he has given to his Venus.

In its subjective phases Botticelli's art is the outcome of a diversity of impulses, a complexity of moods, which reveal the many-sided nature of the man. In some of his Madonnas he conveys an almost morbid intensity into the expression of idealized moments of emotion or

contemplation. In his last picture, *The Nativity*, he rises to an ecstasy of religious fervour. In the *Calumny* he appears as a moral satirist; in the *Pallas* as an accomplished courtier. In his portraiture, which is extensive, since it presumably includes many unidentified figures in the Sistine frescoes, *The Adoration of the Magi*, and other pictures, he shows the penetrative insight into character of a profound student of human nature. Meditative and introspective, he is a psychologist in a generation of anatomists. The mystery of human life, in its deeper issues and sterner problems, interests him greatly; and under the influence of humanistic surroundings he becomes, in his more subjective moods, the chief exponent in art of what Mr. Symonds has termed "the double-mind of the Renaissance"—the *double-mind* which was divided between the conflicting ideals of Christianity and Hellenism, which devoted so much brilliant talent and earnest effort to their reconciliation, and which dwarfed both ideals in the vain endeavour to combine them. The *quattrocento*, while still clinging to the faith it had inherited from mediaevalism, perpetually contrasted this faith with the new conception of life it had acquired from its discovery of antiquity. Before its bewildered eyes the horizons of humanity had suddenly expanded, disclosing the mighty achievements of ancient civilization—a heritage of dignity, beauty and power, which revealed unsuspected resources in the human intellect and imagination, indefinite possibilities in man's creative and reasoning faculties, new and delightful modes of appeal to his intricate nature. Never perhaps had the Religion of the Cross been so clearly recognized as a religion of renunciation as now when, strictly inter-

preted, it stood forth in threatening antagonism to the alluring ideals of pagan life and thought.

This is the attitude of mind in which Botticelli has conceived many of his religious pictures. It would seem that the two opposing ideals of pagan culture and Christian sanctity simultaneously claimed his allegiance. On the one hand, the religion of beauty, of natural gladness and ~~free~~ natural expansion; on the other, the religion of pain—the wrestlings and struggles of asceticism to eliminate whatever is not directly contributive to the supremacy of the supernatural life. Between these rival goals of human aspiration Botticelli, reflecting the mind of the Early Renaissance, stands irresolute. Committing himself wholly to neither, he misses the full significance of both. He never attains to any true comprehension of the antique. The blitheness of the Greek spirit, the synthesis of classic thought and the serenity of classic art, are altogether beyond his reach. The expression of simple natural gladness is outside the range of his achievement. On the other hand, it is only in one or two of his latest pictures, when he was dominated by the influence of Savonarola, that he rises to the full expression of Christian faith and sentiment. In general, while handling Christian themes with all the caressing tenderness of touch due to a revered tradition, he yet approaches them from a purely human standpoint, and accentuates the element of earthly sacrifice and deprivation without conveying any suggestion of supernatural compensation. In the poignant distress of his Baptist, in the plaintiveness of his Madonnas, in the sweet commiseration of some of his child-angels, and the melancholy of many of his saints, he portrays

the Christian life as burdened, rather than exalted, by the obligations of a high spiritual destiny; as almost regretful of the natural joys it has voluntarily forsworn—at once venerable and pitiable in the immensity of its renunciations.

Much of the vague mournfulness—and, perhaps, too, some of the evasive charm—of Botticelli's art, lies in this tendency to dwell on the negative, rather than on the positive, aspect of the conflicting ideals which inspire it—on what each *misses* rather than on what either *attains*. The "sense of loss" is ever present, bringing with it a "sentiment of ineffable melancholy." It is in this conscious sense of loss, and the wistfulness ensuing from it, that his *Venus* so strangely resembles his *Madonna*. Both are great refusals. The one has missed heaven; the other has missed earth. Types of opposing systems, each evokes the other, because in the *quattrocento* conception of life both are equally incomplete expressions of the full spirit of humanity.

This characteristic tendency to typify gives an almost emblematical character to some of Botticelli's pictures. In all his more thoughtful work the figures are felt to be personifications of ideas, moods, or emotions, much more than individualized conceptions of actual persons. In many of his sacred pictures the scene depicted is but a vehicle for the expression of generalizations of thought and feeling—abstractions visualized which possess a purely emblematic value; and he neglects all the concrete elements that would bring his work into touch with actuality. His real subject here is not the given scene or the given personages who take part in it, but the ideas, sentiments, or reflections which this scene

may epitomize, and of which these personages may become idealized types. Thus, his Madonna and Child, amidst all varieties of rendering, are rarely conceived as realities, but as visionary emblems of the meeting of the human with the divine. His saints, as a rule, are the result of no effort to represent actual men and women who once lived upon this earth, but are expressions of various human temperaments in their special impulses and struggles, and particular modes of response. •

Yet, at other times, how completely he shakes off this mood of abstract idealism, and appears as a realistic and dramatic story-teller. In such incident pictures as the *Holofernes* and the *Judith*, in such minor works as the *cassone* panels illustrative of the stories of *Virginia* and *Lucretia* and the history of San Zanobi, Botticelli identifies himself with the personal and individual interest of his subject, and seizing the dramatic moment, represents it with vividness and force. This story-telling element enters, too, into the Sistine frescoes, and here, as in his great *Adoration of the Magi*,¹ he shows a highly individualized grasp of personality, and a vivid and detailed realization of the scenes depicted. *The Adoration of the Magi*, however, stands exclusively apart from the general tenour of his art, and the power of dramatic narrative, though too important to be altogether overlooked, is not the quality that we most value in the Sistine frescoes, nor does it constitute a distinctive aspect of Botticelli's genius. Idealist and visionary by nature, whatever he evinces of realistic power was, I think, deliberately cultivated in response to the demands of contemporary

¹ Uffizi, No. 1286.

taste, and possibly also in a somewhat scornful emulation of the successes of Ghirlandajo and Benozzo Gozzoli.

There is some justice in the accusation, frequently advanced, that Botticelli's art lacks virility. Every artist has his own ideals. Botticelli's ideal of beauty was undoubtedly founded on a feminine type; his ideal of grace was associated with excessive slenderness. The dignity of physical strength and manly vigour at no time attracts him; for to him the body is but the manifestation of the soul and the instrument of its living energies. Alertness appeals to him more than strength; and his art, nervous, swift, delicate, is never majestic or grand. In action (in much of his later work) it is often vehement; in repose it is sometimes languorous with the languor of an exhausted impulse, and though at other moments it reaches almost a tension of contemplative stillness, it is rarely, if ever, *serene*. In common with the contemporary literature and sentiment of which it often visualizes the exotic fantasies, it is (except perhaps in one or two early examples) wholly wanting in simplicity. In all its dainty grace and inimitable charm it is always elaborate, always complex; and its imagery presents the strangest blend of *naïveté* and choiceness.

TECHNIQUE.

At the time when all the artists of Italy were intent upon scientific researches for the application and development of the newly discovered secret of an oil medium, Botticelli strictly adhered to the time-honoured methods of *buon fresco* and *tempera*. There is, says Morelli, no instance of an oil-painting by his hand, and no evidence

that he ever attempted one. He devoted all his efforts to the improvement of *tempera*, in which he attained an extraordinary delicacy of touch, and he is one of the few artists who achieved almost perfect fusion of tints, even in the flesh parts, without appreciable recourse to the process known as *hatching*.¹ He seems, however, to have made innovations and experiments in the preparation of his varnishes, some of which are so thick and glutinous as to give somewhat of an embossed character to several of his pictures, while others show the preponderance of an unctuous vehicle which lends the appearance almost of oil-painting to some of his works. It is difficult, however, to determine how much of these effects may be due to the mistaken zeal of subsequent restorers. By preference he painted on wood panels, though a few of his pictures are on prepared canvas.

All his earlier work—that is, broadly speaking, the work that can with probability be placed before his visit to Rome—gives evidence of extreme care and painstaking, and is very highly and delicately finished. After his long exercise at the Sistine in *fresco* painting he acquired a freer and bolder touch, and the pictures attributable to the Eighties show greater ease and swiftness, a more daring, vigorous, and elaborate sweep of line, and a more flowing rhythm, but much less careful and delicate finish. Later on come signs of haste and impatience, and an increasing negligence of execution.

¹ The viscousness of the *tempera* vehicles—yolk of egg, or yolk and white of egg, sometimes diluted with fig-juice or vinegar—resulted in a lack of blending power. *Hatching* was a means of effecting union of tints by the intermingling of many fine-drawn lines.

DRAWING.

With all his sense of harmony of design, Botticelli is often inaccurate in his drawing, and curiously careless about the proportions of his figures. At times it would seem as if he were more concerned with the abstract quality of his lines considered as elements of design, than with their delineative function as representations of human contours. It is far rarer to find an ugly line in his work than to find faults of drawing and proportion. His figures are generally too slim for their height, the hands and feet are often too large, the former sometimes grossly out of proportion. The exaggerated hip curve which, he gives to some of his female figures, though not in itself an ungraceful line, has a rather unpleasing effect. His heads are usually abnormally small, set upon long stem-like necks, and when, as in the *Ambrosiana Madonna*, he draws a head of ordinary proportions, it has, oddly enough, the effect of being too large for the figure. The long bony hand, with knotted joints and square nails darkly outlined, has been established by Morelli as an invariable characteristic of his work.

MOVEMENT.

As a painter of light, swift movement, Botticelli has rarely, if ever, been equalled. In dealing with movement—the great problem which engrossed the Naturalists—he raises it from the sphere of scientific study to that of artistic perception. And while in many contemporary works the expression of movement becomes the occasion

for a display of anatomical knowledge often unlovely in its effect, Botticelli values movement only as the supreme manifestation of living grace. Thus he eschews all action which requires great bodily exertion, or the exercise of vigorous muscular effort. He finds his opportunity in easy flowing movements which imply no physical strain; actions thrown off from a superabundance of nervous energy—quick eager gestures, the buoyancy of light, springing steps, the sway of a rhythmic dance. He does even more than this. There are times when, as Mr. Berenson says, he seems intent on “communicating *unembodied* values of movement.” Life abstracted from living things, movement dissociated from physical agencies, refined to a quintessence of life and movement identified with pure line—this is the distinctive and crowning achievement of Botticelli’s art. In such motives as intertwined limbs, interlaced fingers, draperies fluttering in the breeze and blown into exquisite arabesques, he unites the “supreme life of line” with great beauty of abstract design. To his delight in living lines is due, too, the interest and mastery he evinces in his treatment of hair. Whether arranged in heavy coiling locks or light rippling curls, in soft yielding masses or loose wind-tossed waves, as a painter of hair he is without a rival. Much of the indefinable charm and grace of many of his heads is due to the living framework with which he encircles them.

Although it is in these living lines that Botticelli’s genius for decoration finds its highest manifestation, yet his power of inventive design is often lavished upon inanimate objects and trifling accessories. Whatever lends itself to ornamental treatment—such minor details

as the sculptured frieze of a seat, the pattern embroidered on a robe, the folds of a mantle, the tracery of an aureole or a crown—is raised in his hands into a motive of decorative beauty, elaborated and finished with unsparing delicacy and care.

COMPOSITION.

It is to his genius for decorative design that Botticelli owes his success in composition. Whenever his subject admits of decorative treatment, and he is able to dispose the lines in reference to the principles of pure design—as, for example, in the *Magnificat*, the *Melagrana tondo*, the Zephyr group in *The Birth of Venus*, the Choir of Seraphs in *The Coronation*, etc.—his composition is superb. Yet in the general acceptance of the word he cannot be called a great master of composition, for his power as a composer is that of a lineal designer only. When he is dealing with a dramatic scene, where the development of the design is controlled by the necessity of expressing particular actions and emotions, and portraying given incidents or events, where, in other words, *representative* aims interfere with the fulfilment of purely *decorative* aims, he often overcrowds his space and produces an impression of intricacy and confusion. In such early works as the *Holofernes* and the *Adoration tondo*, in such late works as the *Calumny*, and the *cassone* panels, and even in such masterpieces as the Sistine frescoes, the distribution is not always very successful, and though the scenes are vividly realized, and many individual groups show great beauty of arrangement, yet as wholes these works lack synthesis of conception and

unity of effect. It would seem that the interest of his subject sometimes carried him beyond the bounds of artistic restraint, and the exuberance of his imagination led him to introduce a multiplicity of motives and figures that he was unable to centralize effectively. His composition here is not to be compared to Ghirlandajo's grandly ordered distribution, and is surpassed by that of Benozzo Gozzoli, Fra Filippo, and even of lesser artists, who in all other respects were Botticelli's inferiors. An exception must be made in favour of the Uffizi *Adoration*. But this picture in its general characteristics is, of all his works, the one that is least typical of his style.

COLOURING.

Botticelli's colouring varies considerably at different periods of his career, and in accordance with the nature of his work. It is always clear and transparent. In his decorative pictures it is generally pale, even cold. In some of his earlier, and most of his later, works it is brilliant in tone, and in many masterpieces of his maturity it is soft and subdued. It is, I think, at its best when pale and delicate. In the *Judith*, the *Pallas*, the *Magnificat*, the *Melagrana*, and the fresco of *Giovanna Tornabuoni*, he has achieved exquisite harmonies of delicate colour. But at other times, when he uses more vivid hues, the colours, though always carefully balanced and complemented, do not always blend into an altogether happy general effect. The contrasts are sometimes too strident and much too detailed, and occasionally resemble the patchiness of a minute mosaic. Indeed, the same defect that at times mars Botticelli's composition enters

also into his colouring. It is too overcrowded. In some of his smaller pictures he introduces too wide a scale of colour, and breaks it up into too variegated an effect, missing all the restfulness of large masses of colour. When analysed, his arrangement is always found to be correct ; but many perfect details do not make a perfect whole, and there are times when his colour-scheme, like his composition, lacks synthesis of construction.

In attempting, however, at this distance to judge of his colouring, allowance must be made not only for subsequent retouchings and repaintings, but for the natural effects of time and the accidental effects of defective varnishes. In many of his pictures the original colouring can only be faintly conjectured.

CHAPTER III

EARLY WORKS

THE most difficult of all Botticelli's pictures to identify are those of his earliest period. The productions of his inexperience, when his style was as yet unformed, his technique imperfect, and his manner tentative, are easily confusable with the works of his followers and imitators. Several pictures which were formerly assigned to his youthful period are now—on the ground, it would seem, that they do not show characteristics that were only fully developed in his prime—considered to be productions of his School or of minor artists influenced by him.

The earliest picture that can with any certainty be ascribed to Botticelli is the *Fortezza*, which he painted for the Pollajuoli about the year 1470. The authenticity of this panel would be established, if for no other reason, by its strong affinity, both in type and in imaginative conception, to the *Judith*, a work far superior in merit, painted probably a year or so later, and indubitably by Botticelli's hand.

But it is not credible that the *Fortezza*, executed when he had been studying his art for over ten years, should represent his first essay in painting, nor is it likely that



Hausfängl photo

THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI

[National Gallery, London]

the Pollajuoli would have intrusted this commission to one who had given no practical evidence of his skill. Where are we to look for Botticelli's earliest pictures?

Mr. Herbert Horne has recently drawn attention to a little fresco of the *Madonna and Child* in a hill-side shrine near Settignano, known as the *Madonna della Vannella*.¹ It has been generally ascribed to Fra Filippo; but, though much damaged and considerably repainted, Mr. Horne detects in it the inimitable "quality of line" peculiar to Botticelli, and considers it a genuine work of our artist, painted probably about the year 1465. In this case it would be the earliest known work of Botticelli, and the only one attributable to the period of his apprenticeship to Fra Filippo.

Another picture which later criticism has claimed for Botticelli is the long panel of *The Adoration of the Magi* in the National Gallery (No. 592). It was formerly considered to be by Filippino Lippi, and is still ascribed to him in the catalogue. In 1883 Morelli declared it to be an early work of Botticelli; and his opinion has been endorsed by Mr. Berenson and Mr. Horne, the latter of whom dates it about 1468. This consensus of authoritative opinion leaves little room for doubt, although at first sight the attribution may not appear very probable. The mellow glow of the colouring is unlike anything Botticelli ever painted, and contrasts unconvincingly with the light, hard tints of the Epiphany *tondo* he executed only a few years later. This effect of mellowness is, however, in great part due to the dark, thick varnish with which the picture at some subsequent date

¹ "Souvenirs de Sandro Botticelli" ("Revue Archéologique," July, 1901)

has been covered. The drawing shows much of that animation which was one of Botticelli's chief characteristics, and it also shows some defects which would only be natural to any inexperienced hand. The composition is remarkably good—almost too good—for a first effort of one who even at his best was not very successful in his management of a crowded space. The verdict, however, of those eminent critics who unanimously attribute the picture to Botticelli will be generally accepted as final.

Mention must here be made of two pictures which several recent writers have classed together as works of Botticelli's youth, but on both of which Mr. Berenson sees the impress of that interesting personality he has introduced as "l'Amico di Sandro:" these are a *Madonna and Child with Angels*, in the Naples Museum, and a *Madonna and Child with the youthful Baptist and Angels*, belonging to the Sta. Maria Nuova Collection now in the Uffizi. With regard to the first, Mr. Berenson has established a very strong case in favour of its ascription to his *Anonimo*. The picture was evidently suggested by Fra Filippo Lippi's beautiful little panel of the same subject in the Uffizi; and throughout it shows the hand of an imitator, rather than that of the inventor of a style.

The Sta. Maria Nuova *Madonna* has been so extensively renovated that it is perhaps venturesome to advance any conjectures concerning it. At the same time, I think it must be admitted, that although this panel does in some respects strongly resemble the Naples one, and shares many of the same defects of drawing, it shows far more originality of conception and independence of treatment. It is less careful, and more spontaneous and spirited;



Alinari photo]

[Sta. Maria Nuova, Florence

THE MADONNA AND CHILD WITH ANGELS

and though obviously a youthful effort, it has the character of an experimental, rather than of an imitative, effort. The distribution of the figures *round* the Madonna, instead of grouped at her knee, is an inventive variation of Fra Filippo's arrangement, and presents in germ the motive that Botticelli developed in the *Melagrana tondo*. The types, too, are more Botticellian than those in the Naples picture. In both, the head of the Madonna is Verrocchian in character; but that of Sta. Maria Nuova has more in common than that at Naples with Botticelli's *Fortezza* and *Judith*. And the attendant angels with their long stem-like necks and sweet, alert faces, already aspire towards the creative types which appear in his great Madonna pictures. While the Naples picture harks back to Fra Filippo's panel, and to Botticelli's "Chigi" *Madonna*, that of Sta. Maria Nuova, whether or no it be by Botticelli's hand, *heralds* what he subsequently achieved in the *Magnificat* and the *Melagrana*. And for this reason I am tempted to dissociate the two; and while accepting the Naples picture as the work of an imitator, to think the Sta. Maria Nuova *Madonna* may represent Botticelli's first essay in a theme which, later on, he was to make his own. If this be so, the evident influence of both Fra Filippo and Verrocchio would indicate a date not later—and possibly earlier—than 1469.

Another debatable picture is the Madonna and Child known as the *Rosebush Madonna*, in the Uffizi (No. 1303). This was generally received as a work of Botticelli's youth until it was disputed by Morelli, and, since his pronouncement opinion is divided concerning it. Whoever may have been its author, it is certainly a very

winsome little picture; and, in spite of some rather doubtful proportions in the figures of the Mother and Child, it possesses great beauty of line and a charming simplicity of conception and treatment. My chief reason for ranking it among Botticelli's early works is, that it appears to me to be linked to the *Fortezza* by much the same affinity of type as links the *Fortezza* to the *Judith*. This connection, however, would only have condemned it in Morelli's eyes, as he also rejected the *Fortezza*. The resemblance between the heads in the two pictures is very striking. Both show the rounded contours, the prominent forehead, the rather turned-up nose with wide nostrils, the full, almost pouting mouth of the Verrocchian type. Both are languidly inclined, as Botticelli's heads generally were; and on both faces is the expression of wistful pensiveness that he rarely failed to convey. This expression, intensified in the *Fortezza* by wide-open yearning eyes, is softened in the Madonna by downcast eyelids that recall the demureness of the Sta. Maria Nuova Virgin. The posture of the two seated figures is very similar—the knees wide apart, the body stiffly set and very long. In both there is the same undue narrowness of chest in proportion to the development of the lower part of the trunk, which was a common fault of our artist. In both, too—drawing attention away from the technical defects—there is the indefinable piquancy which none of Botticelli's imitators ever quite succeeded in catching. If the Madonna is, as I believe, by his hand, it certainly preceded the *Fortezza*, and probably belongs to the year 1469.

Compared with the *Rosebush Madonna*, the *Fortezza* shows more glaring faults of proportion, but also much



Alinari photo]

[Uffizi Gallery, Florence

THE "ROSEBUSH" MADONNA



[Uffizi Gallery, Florence

LA FORTEZZA

greater power and decision. The long body common to both figures is somewhat balanced in the *Fortezza* by an excessive length of limb, which however only serves to accentuate the narrowness of the chest and the smallness of the head. One cannot but wonder what effect this slender maiden would make if she were to stand up! Yet the panel shows an advance upon all the above-mentioned pictures. Its destination as part of a decorative scheme offered opportunities for decorative handling of which the artist has fully availed himself. But the necessity of conforming to a plan prescribed by others somewhat hampered him, and he has followed only too faithfully the hard sculptural manner which characterizes the Pollajuoli's companion panels. This was probably Botticelli's first essay in decorative work, and in executing it he must have learnt a good deal about the requirements of decorative design; and perhaps, too, for the first time, realized his own power as a decorator. What evident delight he took in the ornate lines of the arched and sculptured seat; what pains he lavished on the arrangement of the rich red mantle, the folds of which, in spite of a little too much arrangement, already reveal the sweep of a master's touch! But he has done more. With the instinct of a great decorator, he has made his ill-proportioned figure of *Fortezza* herself decorative. And herein lies the superior charm of his work over that of the Pollajuoli, who have done nothing more than place better-drawn figures and more conventionally conceived allegories, amidst decorative accessories. In the winsome nervous frailty of this maiden sheathed in her breastplate and trappings of steel, her languid nonchalance enthroned as

the symbol of passive resistance, Botticelli excites the imagination to wholly pleasurable effects of contrast, without falsifying the initial conception. For beneath the exterior listlessness he conveys the suggestion of an interior reserve-force—an unlimited capacity for patient endurance. Characteristically whimsical as his interpretation may be, it is characteristically subtle also—the fortitude of physical weakness being necessarily a higher quality, something nearer the quintessence of fortitude, than that which has the support of material resources.

In the naturalistic surroundings of the Pollajuolis' workshop Botticelli could not have escaped a course of scientific training in technique, and the fruits of his studies in anatomy and movement are to be seen in two companion pictures representing events in the story of Judith. Of these, I think that the *Discovery of the Assassination of Holofernes* was the first in order of execution, because only through such technical studies as it presupposes could the artist have attained the freedom and mastery which are manifested in the second panel, *The Return of Judith*.

The crude realism of the *Holofernes* (Uffizi, No. 1158), where the decapitated body of the tyrant figures as the central motive, is foreign to the general tenor of Botticelli's art, and must be ascribed to his temporary subjugation to naturalistic influences. The picture is in many ways remarkable. The management of the nude figure shows what surprising progress he had made in drawing and modelling; the fine lines of the raised tent-curtain, disclosing a glimpse of distant landscape, testify to his innate love of ornamental effect; and his strong grasp of the gruesome situation, his vivid rendering of



Alinari photo]

[Uffizi Gallery, Florence

HOLOFERNES DEAD IN HIS TENT



Walker & Cockerell photo]

[Uffizi Gallery, Florence

RETURN OF JUDITH

the consternation of Holofernes' warriors, gives early evidence of the power of dramatic narrative that from time to time startles us in the course of his visionary and idealistic art. The composition, though good in general design, suffers from the vicious tendency to overload his space which, in his narrative-pictures, Botticelli never altogether overcame.

The Return of Judith (Uffizi, No. 1156) takes rank among Botticelli's masterpieces. It shows how much he had gained in technical power by his association with the Pollajuoli, and yet how little his imagination had really been affected by the methods of the scientific school. All his native poetry asserts itself in his handling of this aspect of the grand old Hebrew story. Though he treats his subject decoratively, he has followed the text with realistic fidelity, even to such details as the "vessels of oil and wine," carried by the serving-maid. And he has caught the spirit of the story in his interpretation of the simple, dauntless devotion of the Jewish heroine. Not only in type does his Judith resemble his Fortezza, but also as an embodiment of the same highly spiritualized conception of fortitude. The picture is well known. Judith, "clothed in the garments of her gladness, adorned with all her ornaments," returns across the hill-country to Bethulia, followed by her maid Abra, bearing the tyrant's head. Shielded by her perfect purity, the dainty feminine grace of this "brave woman who had done so manfully" is unsullied by the horror of her tremendous deed; and unconcerned for aught but the deliverance of her people, she speeds back to them "rejoicing in the victory of the Lord." In one hand she holds an olive-branch—symbol

of the message of peace she brings ; in the other, firmly and unrelentingly she grasps her scimitar—dread instrument of her nation's salvation. Very finely contrasted are the three heads in the picture, which, in their varied expressions, summarize the elements of the dramatic story ; the fury of terror and cruelty impressed on the dead features of Holofernes ; the admiring solicitude, the almost dog-like affection, of Abra ; and the unruffled calm of Judith's fair, resolute, young face.

The great attraction of this little picture, apart from the imaginative handling of the subject, lies in the sense of living movement it so powerfully conveys : the light buoyancy of Judith's step that has the sway of almost a dance of triumph ; the hasty stride of the serving-maid fearful of pursuit ; and the counter-motion of the hill-breeze blowing against them. That Botticelli was able thus vividly to render the life of the wind and the living energy of youthful limbs, he undoubtedly in great part owed to his training under the Pollajuoli. And yet how different is his treatment of movement from that of the leaders of naturalism ! What with them inspires only a technical interest, with him acquires also a highly decorative value. We shall realize this if we try to imagine what this picture would have been if the hill-breeze had been left out of it ; if Judith's robe had clung about her ; if the kerchief round the tyrant's head had fallen in heavy folds ; if Abra's veil had not been blown into those exquisite curves. Not only would the sense of progressive movement in the figures have been diminished through the absence of any suggestion of a resisting force, but how much of the decorative charm—the pure art—of the picture would have been missed !



Walker & Cockerell photo

[National Gallery

THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI

The panel has suffered somewhat at the hands of a reckless restorer, who, besides repainting the background, and retouching in parts the draperies, has deliberately altered the position of Judith's right foot, which he has placed more backward, without, however, altogether effacing the lines of the original pose. The colouring, though probably faded by time, does not appear to have been otherwise interfered with, and the delicate harmony of Judith's robe of white and lilac shaded into one another, and complemented by the dull orange of Abra's garment, we may take to be Botticelli's own.

Both the *Judith* and the *Holofernes* are mentioned by Borghini as having belonged to Ridolfo Sirigatti, and as having been presented by him to Bianca Capello dei Medici, who placed them with other art treasures in her study. From this collection they passed into the Uffizi.

To this period, and to a date, I think, not far removed from that of the *Holofernes* belongs the *tondo* of *The Adoration of the Magi* in the National Gallery (No. 1033). Formerly ascribed to Filippino Lippi (whose name it still bears in the catalogue), it was first recognized by Morelli to be a work of Botticelli's youth. There can be little doubt as to the correctness of this attribution, although the picture, which shows the very evident influence of the Pollajuoli, lacks much of Botticelli's characteristic charm, and in its hardness and angularity of line is one of the least attractive of all his works. The scene is represented with considerable vigour and animation, but the composition is very overcrowded, and the figures are massed into confused groups that give an impression of intricacy, almost of entanglement, to the whole. In spite of the innovation of placing the Holy

Family in the centre of the picture, all effective centralization is marred by the crowded distribution. Although some individual figures show great vivacity and character, many of the attitudes are strained and unnatural; and the horses are very ill-drawn and evidently not taken from life. The colour is clear and bright, but too variegated, and, seen from a distance, has an unpleasant spotted appearance.

This was probably Botticelli's first essay in the *tondo*, or circular form, which later on he made so popular, and which is associated with almost all his school-work. At this time, however, with the exception of a beautiful little *tondo* by Fra Filippo, now in the Pitti, the circular shape was almost unknown in painting, though it had been used in sculpture for decorative bas-reliefs.

In 1473, when Botticelli was already established as *maestro* in his own *bottega*, he was commissioned by Lorenzo dei Medici to paint a *St. Sebastian*. This picture, now in the Berlin Gallery, was at one time attributed to Antonio Pollajuolo, and certainly shows some lingering traces of his influence. In its handling of the nude it is worthy of this master of anatomy; and in the arrangement of the Saint's figure—bound to the trunk of a tree, and standing out against a landscape background—it bears some resemblance to Pollajuoli's work on the same theme (now in the National Gallery).

In its highly idealized rendering of martyrdom, however, it is far removed from the great Naturalist's strong grasp of the reality of his subject. In Pollajuolo's picture the figure of St. Sebastian is but one, though the central, motive of a fully realized scene, and we cannot but feel that the artist's chief interest lay in depicting the vigor-



Hanfstängl photo]

[Berlin Gallery

ST. SEBASTIAN

ous muscular exertions and admirably foreshortened attitudes of the executioners. Yet there is genuine religious feeling in the treatment of the Saint's uplifted face, where the aspirations of faith so clearly triumph over the pangs of bodily distress. In Botticelli's picture, on the contrary, the figure of St. Sebastian forms the sole motive. The executioners are relegated to the far distance, and appear as diminutive figures, which blend with the landscape. The element of persecution and torture is suppressed. In the easy, erect posture of the Saint, his head reflectively inclined, as if in meditation, there is no suggestion of suffering. The arrows which pierce his finely-proportioned body would seem to inflict painless wounds. The placidity of his countenance, its expression of vague sadness and dreamy musing, excludes equally the idea of physical suffering and of spiritual ecstasy. The type of the delicate oval face, almost feminine in its excessive refinement of feature is unlike anything Botticelli had hitherto produced, though it reappears with various modifications in some of his subsequent Madonnas.

In its general character the *St. Sebastian* shows a considerable change of manner—an evident revulsion from the scientific literalness of the Pollajuoli, and a striving after independent types of idealized beauty. Whether this change was in any way the result of external influence, or whether it was but a natural stage in the artist's progressive development, is uncertain. It is, however, possible that even in these early days, his intercourse with the young Leonardo da Vinci may have had some stimulative effect on Botticelli's imagination.

Belonging to the same period as the *St. Sebastian*,

and showing the same idealistic treatment, but touching a far deeper note of mystical significance, is the beautiful little Madonna which, from the name of its former owner, is generally known as the "Chigi" *Madonna*. The Virgin, ascetic and somewhat wasted in type, is seated by an open casement holding the Divine Child—sweet and plump in his gracious babyhood—on her knee. Before her stands the aureoled figure of a youth (or a maiden), bringing a gift of grapes and wheat-ears, towards which the Infant extends a little hand. It is on this symbolical offering, representing the elements of the sacrificial bread and wine, that the mother's eyes are fixed in melancholy contemplation, and the weight of the Great Sacrifice is heavy upon her. As she takes a wheat-ear to give to her babe, it would seem that a vision of the future sweeps into the present. She is absorbed in the coming woe, but, now as then, with meek resignation, she acquiesces in it. It is, however, from the third figure that the picture derives its chief charm—that mysterious young angel, whose angelic nature is denoted only by the aureole, and who has nothing of youth but the clustering, leaf-crowned curls that encircle his sage, world-weary face. The lines of an immense fatigue are traced there as of one who had come from afar, or had been waiting throughout the ages; but an ineffable sweetness radiates from his faint, flickering smile, as with eyes half closed, wrapt, overpowered with contentment, he gazes upon the Holy Child. Botticelli is generally spoken of as the painter of wistfulness and longing. Here, at least, with a deeper spirituality than was usual with him, he succeeded in painting longing satisfied. The painter of

movement here shows himself, too, as the painter of perfect repose. The sense of past and future mingling in one moment of supreme contemplation, gives a peculiar stillness, a hushed calm, to this picture, which is borne out by the tranquil lines of the distant landscape and the serene expanse of sky. •

The faulty proportion of the left hand of the Madonna is an unfortunate flaw, showing that Botticelli was still not quite sure of his technique. In other respects this picture marks a distinct advance from his Pollajuolesque period (of which it bears no trace) towards the period of his full development.

The sale of the picture by Prince Chigi in 1899 to a foreign purchaser, and its subsequent removal from Italy, in contravention of the "Pacca Law," gave occasion to a complicated litigation, of which the final result was the imposition of an enormous fine on Prince Chigi. The picture now forms part of Mrs. T. Gardner's collection at Boston.

The "Chigi" *Madonna* was probably the last picture Botticelli painted before his visit to Pisa in 1474, and it concludes the series of his early works.

CHAPTER IV

WORKS ATTRIBUTABLE TO 1474-1480

THE visit to Pisa was not a success. The trial-picture was never finished; Benozzo Gozzoli remained in undisturbed possession of the Campo Santo walls, and Botticelli returned to Florence with his reputation still to make. His failure, if not attributable to some personal quarrel, may in part have been due to the nature of his subject. The Assumption, a theme which he never at any other time attempted,¹ would hardly have appealed to one whose bent of mind led him to dwell on the human aspect of the Madonna's life. There is also no doubt that the tendency to idealistic rendering, so strongly evinced in his two latest pictures, was not in accordance with the taste of the period. If he treated his *Assumption* in the same mystical spirit in which he had conceived the "Chigi" *Madonna*, his work would scarcely have found favour with those who appreciated the naturalistic pageantries of Benozzo Gozzoli.

¹ The large *Assumption* from the Duke of Hamilton's Collection, now in the National Gallery (No. 1126), was at one time, chiefly on Vasari's authority, mistaken for a work by Botticelli. It is now unanimously ascribed to Francesco Botticini. The similarity of name was probably the cause of Vasari's error.

Be this as it may, it is significant that on his return to Florence, Botticelli, for a time at least, wholly abandons the excessive idealism of his *St. Sebastian* and the mysticism of the "Chigi" *Madonna*; and betakes himself to work more calculated to please contemporary taste, and to win recognition of his power. Within a year or two he produces in *The Adoration of the Magi* a picture worthy to compare with the best achievements of Ghirlandajo or Gozzoli, while in the decorative panel called *Mars and Venus* he enters upon a class of work in which, later on, he was to tower above all comparison.

His first work after his return from Pisa in the autumn of 1474 seems to have been that strangely devised standard which was borne before the victorious Giuliano in the *giostra* of January, 1475. The subject, *Pallas standing on the device of a burning olive bush, holding a Medusa shield in one hand and a lance in the other, with the God of Love bound at her feet and a resplendent Sun rising behind her*, probably had some reference to Giuliano's passion for Simonetta, figured perhaps as a contest between wisdom, love, and glory. It may have been Botticelli's own conception, but was more likely suggested to him by Poliziano—master in such mythological conceits, or even by Giuliano himself. All traces of this banner have now been lost. It seems to have won much praise for the artist, and would have had the double advantage of bringing him into closer contact with the Medici, and of introducing him to that form of poetical allegory from which so many of his decorative motives were derived.

To the same class of painting belongs the panel known as *Mars and Venus* (National Gallery, No. 915).

From its form it was evidently destined for the decoration of a doorway ; and it was probably a commission for one of the Medicean palaces which Botticelli owed to his success with Giuliano's banner.

The date of this panel is approximately fixed by its connection with a passage in Poliziano's "Stanze per la Giostra," an unfinished poem (published in 1476), celebrating the love of Giuliano and his victory in the *giostra*, or tournament. This connection, first pointed out by Dr. Richter, is, however, not the connection of a definite illustration, but of a suggestion caught from a poetic conceit and developed into a pictorial vision. The *giostra* had taken hold of the Florentine imagination, fascinated at all times by the attractive personality of Giuliano. The path to success, whether in politics or art, was lighted by the favour of the Medici, and Botticelli, conscious of his still unrecognized power, unconscious perhaps as yet of a genius which rendered him independent of the approval of princes, catches the popular enthusiasm and seeks to present his incomparable art under the cover of a complimentary tribute to his patrons.

In a passage of the "Giostra" the poet has figured his hero as asleep and dreaming of love and war. In the confusion of his dreams he beholds his lady vested in the armour of Pallas, and is much troubled at the sight. Cupid, coming to his assistance, whispers that a goddess shall lead him to victory, and that after his conquests this same divinity will despoil his beloved of her arms and leave her in the *bianca gonna*, the white feminine robe, he knows so well.

It is this incident of the hero's dream which gave the impulse to Botticelli's creative vision ; but in de-



Walker & Cockerell photo

MARS AND VENUS

[National Gallery

veloping these literary elements into a masterpiece of pure design he leaves the poetic original far behind him. Beginning with an adulatory intention, he ends by being wholly absorbed in abstract art. Although there is some likelihood, as Professor Richter observes, that in the gracious countenance of the watching lady the artist has delineated the features of Simonetta, he has made no attempt to invest the sleeping warrior with any resemblance to Giuliano. He is content to paint a beautiful nude. What matter to him, as he traced those exquisite living contours, whether they represented the form of Mars, or of Giuliano, or of some imaginary being? His interest, and the permanent value of his work, was in the decorative quality of the lines, beside which the literary significance becomes of secondary importance. The little satyrs are an addition to Poliziano's imagery. Count Plunkett has suggested that they were derived by Botticelli from a passage in Lucian's "Herodotus," which describes the "Little Cupids playing with Alexander's arms—three of them bearing his spear like porters who are bent down with the weight of a beam." The quaint little figures are poetically related to the subject of the picture as representing a whimsical conception of the agency of dreams, as is evident from the action of the foremost of the three, who whispers through a shell into the sleeper's ear. Yet here again the artist's interest is felt to be not so much in their poetical as in their decorative *raison d'être*. How he revelled in the soft wavy lines of their curly-haired little flanks, in the curves of their baby arms entwined at intervals round the straight shaft of the hero's spear. Their gleeful little faces faintly recall some of Fra Filippo's

children's heads ; and there is a distinct reminiscence of Botticelli's Pollajuolesque training in the admirable foreshortening of the warrior's uplifted face. The colouring of this panel is in the pale, cold tints that Botticelli always employed for his decorative work, the darkness of the myrtles in the background being carefully calculated to throw up the lines of the lady's draperies and the contours of the nude figure.

There is much probability that at this period, when Botticelli was working not only with great industry and determination, but also with surprising versatility, he had already turned his attention to portrait painting, for the treatment of the heads in *The Adoration of the Magi* (which belongs to this time) indicates an artist experienced in portraiture.

Several portraits once attributed to him (such as those in the Liechtenstein Gallery and the Louvre, and the portraits of Giuliano at Berlin and Bergamo) are now generally recognized to be the work of his followers or pupils. It is also possible that some of the Master's authentic portraits have yet to be discovered.

An early and undoubtedly genuine work is the *Portrait of a Young Man*, in the National Gallery (No. 626), which at one time was mistakenly ascribed to Masaccio, but was recognized by Morelli as a work of our artist. Evidently painted from life, this sallow-faced, eager-eyed youth, whose individuality Botticelli has presented so vividly, is a type of the vivacious, self-sufficient, rather impertinent young Florentine whose descendants may be recognized to this day bounding down the university steps or parading the streets at night with their guitars. The small scarlet cap pressed on the dark, falling locks



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[National Gallery

PORTRAIT OF A YOUNG MAN



Walker & Cockerell photo

[The Accademia, Florence]

PORTRAIT OF GIOVANNI DI COSIMO DE' MEDICI

the straight folds of the tunic, with its neatly tied little cord at the throat, are characteristic touches which serve to accentuate the exuberance of nervous life that glows in the pale, rather unhealthful face.

Another portrait, though probably of a later date, is that in the Uffizi (No. 1154), of a man of lordly mien whose connection with the Medici is made evident by the medal of Cosimo which he holds. It is generally supposed to represent Giovanni dei Medici, younger son of Cosimo and uncle of the Magnificent. As a portrait, if that surmise is correct, it is of less interest than the preceding one, as it cannot have been painted from life, Giovanni having died in the year 1461. In the strong, intellectual features Botticelli shows his power of reconstructing a vigorous and commanding personality; and the soft mass of thick, wavy hair which frames the hard, almost gaunt outlines of the face, is rendered with wondrous delicacy and life.

We now come to a very important picture, *The Adoration of the Magi* (Uffizi, No. 1286), which, although there is some uncertainty as to its exact date, was without doubt painted some time between the years 1476 and 1478 inclusive. It is the most scientific and realistic of all Botticelli's masterpieces, and as such it furnishes a remarkable instance of the versatility of his genius. Though belonging to the same period as the panel of the warrior's dream, it has nothing in common with this work, except an obvious desire to do honour to the Medici, of which family it contains several portraits.

The question of the precise date of its execution has been supposed to turn on the moot point of whether or no the portrait of Giuliano is included among those of

his illustrious forbears. There is no doubt that in the First King who, vested in a dark olive-green mantle richly wrought with gold, kneels in adoration before the Holy Child, Botticelli has represented Cosimo, *Pater Patriae*; that the Second, resplendent in scarlet and ermine, is a portrait of Piero, Cosimo's eldest son and father of Lorenzo;¹ and that the Third, in white, is Giovanni, Piero's brother, whom Botticelli again painted in the Uffizi portrait. Does the meditative, dark-robed figure standing over the Third King represent Giuliano? Professor Ulmann, and, following him, Signor Supino, believe that it does: they also believe that the figure in doublet and hose in the left-hand corner is a portrait of Lorenzo. They deduce therefrom that the picture must have been painted after Giuliano's assassination in the Pazzi conspiracy in April, 1478, as, had it been painted in his lifetime, he would have been placed by the side of Lorenzo rather than in the immediate company of his defunct ancestors. The argument is not very conclusive: (firstly) because, though in its resemblance to other portraits there are strong grounds for admitting the portrait of Giuliano, no such grounds exist with regard to the figure alleged to represent Lorenzo; (secondly) because, as Mr. Horne in a recent article has pertinently remarked, "if the picture had been painted subsequently to the murder of Giuliano on April 26th, 1478, we should have expected to find his portrait, rather than that of Giovanni, in the figure of the third Mage . . . a compliment which even in the fifteenth century would hardly have been extended to a

¹ Vasari was evidently in error when he identified the second Mage with Piero's son, Giuliano.



Walker & Cockerell photo

THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI

[Uffizi Gallery, Florence]

living person.”¹ On the other hand, Mr. Horne, in assigning the picture for reasons of style to the more probable date of *c.* 1476-1477, seems to imply, if I understand him rightly, that it can therefore contain *no* portrait of Giuliano. Of the murdered hero, certainly not; but why not of the living Giuliano, who precisely because he is living and not dead, is represented not as one of the Magi, but as the foremost personage of their entourage; and whose mournful countenance and sad-hued garb is an allusion not to his own untimely fate (as Professor Ulmann, I think, has suggested), but to the recent loss, in 1476, of his beloved Simonetta.

The theory—also Professor Ulmann’s—that the picture, which for many years hung over an altar in Sta. Maria Novella, was presented to this church by Lorenzo as a votive offering for his escape from assassination, has been disposed of by Mr. Horne’s researches. He has discovered documentary evidence that it found its way to Sta. Maria Novella through one Giovanni Lami, a Florentine merchant, to whom the altar it surmounted belonged.

Whether the picture was painted to the worthy merchant’s order, or was acquired by him after its completion, does not transpire. The exquisite finish of the work, so admirably planned, and so accurately carried out in almost every detail, implies not only immense industry, but also great deliberation, on the part of the artist, and suggests that its execution may have extended over a considerable time. Though probably not finished till 1477, I am inclined to think it may have been begun as early as 1475, and that it was therefore in course of

¹ *Vide* “Monthly Review,” February, 1902.

progress at the time when the *Mars and Venus*, a work of much more rapid inspiration, was conceived and terminated. In this case it is probable that it was first undertaken not as a commission, but as an independent essay of skill. Commenced within a few months of his Pisan experience it owes its origin, I believe, to Botticelli's determination to prove that, although the affinities of his genius drew him to other kinds of painting, he was yet perfectly capable of rivalling his most admired contemporaries of the scientific school. If this were his purpose, he succeeded in it so well that for half a century after its removal from the Poggio Imperiale to the Uffizi in 1796 the picture was mistaken for a work by Ghirlandajo, while at the time of its execution it served, as Mr. Horne has pointed out, to establish Botticelli's fame as a great master among his contemporaries.

Though the strong characterization of the heads seems to justify the assumption that the picture contains many portraits—possibly those of Poliziano, Pulci and other notabilities of the Medicean Court,—none of the figures beyond those already mentioned can be satisfactorily identified. It is, however, generally conceded that the orange-robed figure in the right-hand corner, with the keen eyes and the heavy, determined jaw, is a portrait of the artist himself.

The Adoration is perhaps Botticelli's greatest triumph in composition. Although some thirty figures are introduced into an extremely restricted space, the distribution is so well ordered, and the attitudes so carefully planned, that there is no impression of confusion, and, as Vasari says, it is possible to clearly distinguish the separate retinues of the three kings. While the attitude of each

individual figure is perfectly natural, their combination makes a symmetrical and imposing scene; and the pyramidal arrangement which places the Holy Family on some raised steps, insures the centralization which was wanting in Botticelli's earlier *tondo*. The colouring is clear and brilliant, with a frequent use of gold for the ornaments and broideries, which are finished with extreme delicacy and elaboration.

It is curious that into a work betraying such immense care and painstaking, there should still creep faults of proportion. The group of the Holy Family is perhaps less highly finished than any other part of the picture. It is possible that the abnormally diminutive proportions given to the Holy Child, though out of harmony with the scientific character of the work, may have been intentional on the artist's part to draw attention to the supernatural aspect of the scene. But the drawing and modelling of the little figure are not very good; and the Madonna's hand shows the same defective proportions as that in the "Chigi" *Madonna*, these being the only blemishes in an otherwise almost faultless picture.

The work by which in modern times Botticelli is perhaps most widely known, and which popularly ranks as his masterpiece, is the large panel in the Accademia at Florence (No. 80), which generally goes by the name of *Spring*, but is also sometimes called the *Realm of Venus*. Few of his pictures have been so much discussed, both as to date of execution and significance of subject.

With regard to the former point, the majority of critics agree in assigning it to the early part of 1478; and as it is known to have been painted for Lorenzo the

Magnificent, they consider the commission was a result of the artist's great success with *The Adoration of the Magi*. Signor Supino, on the other hand, ascribes it to 1483-1484, on the grounds: (1st) of a certain classical tendency, supposed to denote Botticelli's post-Roman period; (2nd) of its alleged similarity to the Berlin Madonna, painted in 1485; (3rd) of its alleged connection with Poliziano's Latin poem, "Rusticus," written in 1483. At one time I held this view, though not so much for the reasons stated, as because the sense of swift undulating movement which distinguishes this picture was, I thought, a quality that Botticelli only fully developed after the execution of the Sistine frescoes. Closer study has convinced me that I was wrong. Already in the *Judith* he had manifested his power over movement; and the strong similarity, remarked by Mr. Horne, between the head of the central figure in *Spring*, and that of the Madonna in the *Adoration*,—the traces of Pollajuolesque influence, observed by Mr. Berenson, in the figures of Mercury and the Graces, and which from now onward disappear from Botticelli's fully developed art,—the type of the Graces marking, as Herr Jacobsen says, the transition from the egg-shaped faces of the artist's earlier manner to the perfect oval of his mature style,—all these are indications that point conclusively to a date not later than 1478.

With regard to the allegorical significance of the picture, many elaborate theories have been advanced by which the central figure is identified, now with *Venus*, now with *Spring*, now with Simonetta Vespucci, and sometimes with all three, and by which the left-hand figure plays the double rôle of Mercury and Giuliano. To



Walker & Cockerell photo

PRIMAVERA ("SPRING")

[Accademia, Florence]

summarize as briefly as possible a few of these theories. Professor Steinmann, amongst other critics, thinks that the picture is an illustration of a passage in the "Giostra" describing Giuliano's first meeting with Simonetta. Through a forest glade the Prince is riding to the hunt, when he is arrested by the sight of a beautiful lady wearing a garland of flowers and a white, flower-embroidered robe, and who, rising at his approach, lets fall a lapful of flowers at her feet. The connection between the poem and the picture, which have nothing in common except the forest glade and the flower-embroidered robe (this, by the way, not worn by the chief figure), is so slight that one wonders it can ever have been advanced as a serious explanation of Botticelli's central motive. The passage in question leaves the right-hand group in the picture quite unaccounted for, and makes no mention that Giuliano happened at that moment to be masquerading as Mercury.

Signor Supino, with much more show of reason, thinks that the picture has some reference to Lorenzo's verses in the "Selve" in praise of the springtime; and following Signor Marrai, he thinks the figures are personifications of the beneficent forces of nature. He also follows Professor Warburg in connecting it with Poliziano's "Rusticus" (written 1483), because this poem "describes the assembly of the gods in the springtime as including precisely the same figures as those represented in Botticelli's painting." A comparison of the respective dates of picture and poem is sufficient to refute this latter theory. And the community of imagery may perhaps be accounted for by the assumption that in this instance it was not the painter who followed the poet, but the poet who followed the painter.

Herr Emil Jacobsen has suggested an interpretation which would be pretty if it were not too far-fetched and intricate. In his opinion the motive of the picture was to perpetuate the memory of Simonetta ; and the scene is laid in the Elysian fields, where she awakes to new life on the other side of death. He goes on to suggest that the central figure represents Simonetta as she was in life, vested in the robe she used to wear, and with the expression of suffering on her face that characterized her last days on earth ; while the nude figure to the right symbolizes her spirit escaping from the grasp of Death and entering the abode of the blessed. She is therefore represented twice in the picture ; but, as Herr Jacobsen seems also to support the "Giostra" theory, it would appear that she figures yet a third time as the flower-garlanded damsel of the forest glade.

Elaborate allegory was undoubtedly a taste of the late *quattrocento* ; but would any great artist, however much a "child of his age," devote some of his best work to embodying such a confusion of ideas as this ? Botticelli, though sometimes dreamy and indeterminate in the expression of moods and musings, shows himself clear-headed and direct enough in his methods whenever—as for example, in *Pallas with the Centaur*—he wishes to convey a definite allegorical meaning. Even if *Spring* were a tribute to Simonetta's memory, it is difficult to believe that he would have conceived anything so clumsily abstruse as this double, or even triple representation of her earthly and her disembodied life. When we remember that the picture was painted two years after her death, and that the Florentine imagination is too impressionable to be constant in its impressions ; that

moreover, it was painted for Lorenzo and not for Giuliano; and that it was finished considerably more than a year after the latter had transferred his affections to the mother of Pope Clement VII., it seems highly improbable that the picture contains any allusion* to Simonetta whatever.

I have already expressed my conviction that Botticelli's purpose in *Spring* was purely decorative. The whole poetical significance of the picture, I believe, lies in its name—the name by which, since Vasari so refers to it, it was evidently known in the artist's lifetime—*Primavera*, the Spring. The glories of the springtime, this is Botticelli's subject; and his aim is to express in painting that intense delight in sylvan life which contemporary poets had expressed in song. As the ornate, somewhat artificial taste of the age was towards personification, and as the decorative character of his work required the introduction of figures, he embodies his subject in figurative images derived indiscriminately from various poetical sources. Appropriately enough, he identifies the springtime with the realm of Venus; for is not Venus the presiding divinity of the season of love, and her realm one perpetual spring?

He lays his scene in a flowery greensward shaded by a thick orange grove—such a spot, unreal in its exotic daintiness, as poets have imagined as the playground of fairies or the resort of gods. Some of his imagery here may have been suggested by the description in the "Giostra" of the *Regno di Venere*; and the orange grove may be a version of Poliziano's "gran pianta che fronde ha di smeraldo, e pomi d'oro." Standing in a myrtle bower amidst the orange trees, he

places a gentle, queenly lady, whose subdued wistfulness expresses the "yearning for something afar" which clings round so many of his idealized types. Sweet and contemplative, she is strongly reminiscent of the Madonna of the *Adoration*; and her identity with the goddess of love is indicated only by the little Cupid who draws his bow in the orange boughs above her head. Why is it that in this gracious lady, draped in the costume of the day, Botticelli has made no attempt to realize the Greek conception of the divinity she represents? In the first place, the wholly imaginative character of his work dispensed him from all obligation of doing so. He was not aiming at the literal reproduction of a myth any more than at the actual reproduction of a reality. The picture is a pure fantasy, of which the elements are developed in relation only to their artistic quality. Here we touch, I think, the reason of Botticelli's bizarre departure from convention: namely, that his work gains thereby both in poetical and decorative value. Imagine in place of this draped mediaeval Venus an orthodox classical nude, and the picture would not only lose much of its elusive charm, the touch of mystery which fascinates, but the effect of the three contiguous figures, so transparently vested as to be virtually nudes, would be considerably diminished. Botticelli was a master of contrasts; and the contrast here of the draped with the undraped figures enhances the charm of both.

The Spirit or Genius of Spring calls for embodiment as the foremost figure of Venus's sylvan court, and Botticelli conceives her wreathed and garlanded with flowers, arrayed in a light, flower-embroidered robe, and bearing an armful of roses, like that forest-apparition in the

"Giostra," which seemingly caught his fancy and became associated for him with the idea of youth and flowers. Yet as if to disclaim all connection with the subject of the "Giostra," he gives to his Spring Maiden—wanton, imperious, provocative—a type that he never repeated, the one Leonardesque type which appears in his art, with searching eyes and "unfathomable smile."¹

The spring flowers call for their divinity—Flora, goddess of flowers, and for the strong spring breezes that fertilize them. And there comes to the artist's mind a vision imaged by Ovid (and reproduced by Poliziano) of Flora chased by Zephyrus and generating blossoms from her mouth as he touches her.

On the other hand, the Lady Venus must not be unattended, and so Botticelli introduces as her nymphs the three Graces, not for any emblematical reason, but because a description in Alberti's "*Libro di Pittura*" (a work he is known to have studied) haunted his imagination, and he longed to visualize what had been so delightfully described: "What shall we say of these three maidens to whom Hesiod gave the names of Aglaia, Euphrosina, and Thalia; and whom he depicts arrayed in light vestments, laughing together with hands interlaced, resplendent in their beauty?"

What, however, is the significance of the remaining figure, Mercury, who with uplifted hand seems to be

¹ It was not, of course, until many years later that Leonardo realized this type in the great masterpieces with which we now associate it. Throughout his life, however, he seems to have been haunted by one and the same type, and it is not unlikely that in his youth it was already the subject of drawings and sketches which were known to Botticelli, and influenced the latter in his conception of the Spring Maiden.

shaking the fruit from the orange boughs? I think he is merely a decorative motive introduced to balance the group on the other side of the picture; and, as such, he has no other *raison d'être* here than his decorative relation to a decorative *ensemble*. Yet his presence is not incongruous; for as the herald and messenger of the gods he is frequently associated in classical literature with Venus and the Graces.

It is from such scattered poetical reminiscences as these that Botticelli has constructed his vision of spring-time, weaving these slender fancies into a design of inimitable life and charm. As a piece of lineal decoration, *Spring* ranks with his later masterpieces of *The Birth of Venus* and the Lemmi frescoes, the painter of which has been called by Mr. Berenson, "the greatest artist of lineal design that Europe has ever had."

The colouring, though faded by time, unpreserved even by the thick coat of varnish which covers the panel, was probably always subdued. White and pale opalesque transparencies prevail; the red of Venus's mantle, the greens and pinks of the Spring Maiden's flowers, the dull magenta of Mercury's drapery, and the mysterious grey-blue of Zephyrus's wind-blown cloak being the only touches of definite colour. At the time of its execution the glimpses of sky between the tree stems, and the golden fruit above, were probably of a more vivid hue.

The panel seems to have been painted for one of Lorenzo's palaces, and when Vasari wrote some sixty years later it was at the Medici villa at Castello. It was probably only just finished when Florence was thrown into mourning by Giuliano's murder in the Pazzi conspiracy. Almost immediately after this event Botti-



Anderson photo]

[Poldo-Pezzoli Gallery, Milan

THE MADONNA AND CHILD

celli was commissioned by Lorenzo to paint effigies of the traitors on the walls of the Bargello; a work which, from the record of a payment made to him in July, he appears to have finished in less than three months.

The troubles of Florence were not confined to the loss of the popular idol. The consequences of the Pazzi conspiracy plunged the Republic into diplomatic complications which not only threatened the supremacy of her First Citizen, but menaced her very existence as a leading Italian power. Lorenzo at this juncture was far too much harassed with affairs of state to devote attention to the interests of art, and for at least eighteen months Botticelli received no further commission from his princely patron. In this interval he seems to have returned to the Madonna theme, which he never at any time wholly abandoned.

To about this period, or even somewhat earlier, belongs, I think, the beautiful little *Madonna* in the Poldi Pezzoli Collection (No. 156) at Milan. The date of this picture, which has been considerably restored, is indicated by the oval type of the Madonna, a type that does not appear in Botticelli's female heads before 1477; by the *mise-en-scène* in an interior with open casement in the background, an arrangement that (with the exception of the *Annunciation*) does not occur in any pictures of his post-Roman period; and by the careful and delicate finish which distinguished all his painting between 1475 and 1480. The picture has the character of a first step in the direction of the *Magnificat*; and it may even have originated as a sketch for the central figures of this great *tondo*. It is, however, far more acute in feeling. The poignant foreboding of the "Chigi" picture is repeated

in the sad, set features of the Madonna, and there is deep pathos in the inspiration which gives as playthings to the Holy Child the instruments of His future Passion, the miniature crown of thorns that hangs from the dimpled arm, and the nails which his baby hand toys with. The unnecessary complication of detail in the piled books, the cushion, and the bowl of fruits, rather detracts from the general effect, and indicates a comparatively early work.

Professor Ulmann has expressed the opinion that already in 1475 Botticelli was engaged upon those *tondi*, or circular pictures, of the Madonna and angels, which are associated with his name and school. Some of the pictures, however, which Herr Ulmann assigns to this period, such as, for example, the Berlin *tondo* with seven angels bearing lights, can hardly be by the Master's hand.

There is nevertheless probability in the assumption that before Botticelli achieved the masterpiece of the *Madonna of the Magnificat*—a work which, I think, belongs to c. 1479—he must have made many essays and studies in the composition of *tondi*, and that some of these sketches and designs may have been completed, with various modifications and developments, by his pupils and assistants. The motive of the Madonna surrounded by angels certainly seems to have haunted him. It was, according to Vasari, the rendering he chose for the unfinished *Assumption* at Pisa, and perhaps it was his failure in this early effort that led him to revert again and again to the same theme. It is possible that very soon after his return from Pisa he was engaged, in the intervals of other work, upon studies preparatory to the



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[Uffizi Gallery, Florence]

THE MADONNA OF THE MAGNIFICAT

realization of a conception which was slowly forming in his creative imagination.

When for the first time he realizes it—in the vision of the *Magnificat* (Uffizi, No. 1267 *bis*)—he does so by transferring his scene from heaven to earth. He represents the Madonna not in the joy of her unparalleled heavenly triumph, but in the melancholy of her unparalleled earthly destiny ; not in the consummation, but at the outset, of her consecrated life ; in the early days of her miraculous motherhood, surrounded not by a choir of seraphic spirits, but by a throng of angelic children, human, yet not altogether earthly, angels incarnate who have retained something of their ethereal nature. Whence did Botticelli derive those enchanting types which, varied and developed, reappear in much of his later work, but which—assuming the *Magnificat* to have been painted in 1479—do not resemble anything he had painted as yet? I think, primarily, from life. Some child's face seen perhaps by chance, caught in a moment of sweet childish eagerness, uplifted in prayer or in solicitous inquiry, impressed itself on the artist's imagination, and became the basis of a type which, in reproducing, he highly idealized.¹

In feeling, the *Magnificat* shows far less intensity of emotion, much more *suavity* of mood, than is usual in Botticelli's religious pictures. The sadness with which

¹ Herr Müntz has noted a resemblance between the head of the *Magnificat* Madonna and a drawing by Leonardo now in the library at Windsor. This resemblance (which is more in the pose than the features) has been adduced by Signor Supino to confirm the ascription of the *Magnificat* tondo to a date prior to 1481, when Botticelli left for Rome, as on his return, Leonardo was no longer in Florence.

he habitually invested his Madonnas is here reduced to a vague, soft melancholy ; and but for the inspired eyes of the Holy Child, and the eager life of the child-angels, the religious as well as the human interest is subordinated to the development of a motive of artistic beauty. The composition of this picture has been likened by Mr. Symonds to the "corolla of an open rose." The grouping is superbly designed to suit the requirements of circular distribution. Not only are the attitudes of the figures so arranged that their leading lines shall follow the marginal curve, but in almost every detail, in the trailing wreaths of the Madonna's veil, in the loosely coiled plaits of her hair, the careless knot of her kerchief, and even the carved tracery of her chair, as well as in the wavy masses and soft locks of the angels' hair, and the windings of the distant river, the artist has introduced an elaboration of curves and undulations which respond to the external circle and repeat its flow of line with infinite variations.

The colouring is clear and soft, and so harmoniously blended as to appear almost subdued in tone. There is considerable use of gold in the hair and ornaments ; and in every detail the picture is exquisitely and delicately finished.

There is considerable affinity of type between the Madonna of the *Magnificat* and the Pallas in the political allegory of *Pallas and the Centaur*. The date of this picture is fixed by its evident reference to Lorenzo's successful policy in restoring peace to the Republic by his diplomatic visit to the King of Naples. He had started on his mission in the December of 1479, accompanied by the apprehensions of his people. Early in



Alinari photo

[Pitti Palace, Florence]

PALLAS WITH THE CENTAUR

1480 he returned in triumph, and was received with acclamation by the whole Republic. It was to celebrate this event that Botticelli painted his beautiful allegory of the victory of peace won by the exercise of (Medicean) wisdom. On a hill-ground overshadowed by a dark ruined monument and overlooking an expanse of bay and hills, which may be an idealized representation of the Bay of Naples, stands Pallas, goddess of wisdom and protectress of states, crowned with the olive of peace, and grasping by the hair a centaur who cringes beside her and represents the vanquished spirit of discord. The goddess, wearing orange sandals that tread lightly on the greensward, is clothed in a white flowing robe shaded into opalesque tints and embroidered in bronze with the interlaced rings which were the badge of the Medici. A rich green mantle is loosely folded round her, and her auburn hair falling over it floats in the breeze. On her breast, in lieu of armoured breast-plate, she bears a scroll of olive leaves, and olive sprays are twined about her arms and waist and circle round her hair. As pure ornament, Botticelli has done little that surpasses this exquisite tracery of leaves. From a mere emblematical sign—part of an allegory crude enough in itself—he has, as Mr. Berenson says, developed an essential element of beauty. The impassioned piteousness of the centaur contrasts vividly with the imperious placidity of his victor. What care Botticelli has bestowed on this figure which might otherwise “have been read off as a mere empty symbol! He constructs the torso and flanks in such a way that every line, every indentation, every boss, appeals so vividly to the sense of touch that our fingers feel as if they had

everywhere been in contact with his body. . . . As to the hair—imagine shapes having the supreme life of line you may see in the contours of licking flames, and yet possessed of all the plasticity of something which caresses the hand that models it to its own desire.”¹

This beautiful picture was discovered as recently as 1895, in one of the ante-rooms of the Pitti Palace, by Mr. William Spence of Florence, who at once recognized it as a work of Botticelli's. After some renovation (it had already been painted over in parts) it was for a time exhibited at the Uffizi; but has since been removed to the private apartments of the Pitti Palace. There is no evidence as yet forthcoming to show whether it originated in a commission. Signor Poggi has recently discovered an inventory of the Medici Palace, made in 1516 on the occasion of a division of property, in which a picture representing “una figura con una Minerva e uno centauro” is mentioned. The description undoubtedly applies to Botticelli's work which was probably presented to Lorenzo on his return from Naples, perhaps by one of his friends, perhaps as a tribute from the artist himself.

In this same year, 1480, Botticelli was brought into open competition with Ghirlandajo. He received an order to paint in fresco a St. Augustine for the Church of the Ognissanti, where Ghirlandajo was engaged upon a companion fresco of St. Jerome. In executing this work Vasari tells us that Botticelli “did his very utmost to surpass all the artists of the day, *but especially Ghirlandajo*”; and that he “gained great credit and admiration for his work.” The figure, wearing a large

¹ “Florentine Painters of the Renaissance,” by Bernhard Berenson.



Brogi photo

[Church of Ognissanti, Florence]

ST. AUGUSTINE

mantle which falls in sweeping folds about him, is represented amidst all the accessories of a student's life, and might itself stand for the personification of intellectual effort. The noble face, furrowed with lines of thought, is uplifted as if in a moment of profound perplexity, or in anticipation of an inspiration which is withheld, and the keen eyes seem to be searching for some spiritual light that will extend the researches of thought. *Thought*, carried to its uttermost limits and straining past these limits to the unfathomable mystery beyond—this is what Botticelli, with incomparable force and *finesse*, has expressed in the figure called *St. Augustine*.

In the December of this year Giuliano della Rovere, nephew of Pope Sixtus IV., passing through Florence on his way to France, brought an invitation from his uncle to Botticelli and other leading Florentine painters to undertake the decoration of the newly-erected Sistine Chapel at Rome.

CHAPTER V

THE SISTINE FRESCOES

THE artists commissioned by Pope Sixtus IV. to undertake the decoration of his new chapel were the Florentines Ghirlandajo, Cosimo Rosselli, and Botticelli; and the Umbrians Perugino and Pinturicchio. It appears that they all brought assistants. Piero di Cosimo came as Rosselli's assistant; and it is probable that Fra Diamante, who certainly was present, may have accompanied Botticelli in the same capacity. The young Filippino Lippi is also supposed to have been amongst the Master's company of workers.

There is some disagreement among authorities as to the date of Botticelli's arrival in Rome. Signor Supino and Professor Steinmann place it in the year 1481. Mr. Berenson, in an article on Botticelli's *Pallas*,¹ alludes to the artist's visit to Rome as an event of 1482. Miss March Phillipps, in her pleasant work on the Sistine frescoes, says that the Florentine painters did not appear till some time in 1482, and Professor Lippmann thinks that Botticelli arrived only in the October of 1482. I do not know what, if any, documentary evidence exists to support this theory. We know from

¹ "Gazette des Beaux-Arts," June, 1895.

Jacobus Volaterranus and other writers that the frescoes were completed by August 15th, 1483. We are ready to admit that the *quattrocento* was an age of artistic prodigies. But is it within the range of human possibility that works so inventively planned, so elaborately carried out, as Botticelli's three contributions to the Sistine scheme (to say nothing of his collaborators' achievements with which we are not here concerned), could have been conceived, prepared, and completed in less than a year? The actual execution of fresco is, from the nature of the process, necessarily rapid, as the colours must be laid on while the surface of the *intonaco* is wet. But this does not dispense the artist from the long preliminary labour of carefully preparing his designs and transferring them from the original cartoon to the wall-plaster. Indeed, as nothing once done in fresco can be altered, it calls for more careful and deliberate preparation than any other form of painting.

The builders left the Chapel some time in 1480, and the Pope was impatient for its completion. The Florentine painters received their commission at the end of this year through the medium of Cardinal Giuliano della Rovere. There are no grounds whatever, that I can discover, for assuming that they delayed eighteen months in obeying this important summons. Moreover, a contract dated October 27th, 1481, between the representatives of the Pope on the one hand and the painters on the other, in which the latter undertake to complete their work by the 15th March following (an engagement they did not fulfil), is so phrased as to imply that some, at least, of the decoration was then proceeding.

It is therefore probable that Botticelli arrived in

Rome in the early part of 1481. He seems to have commenced his work with the execution of some of the twenty-eight portraits of early Popes, which surmount the series of biblical scenes.

The Sistine Chapel, designed by the Florentine architect, Giovannino dei Dolci, is a parallelogram in form, measuring 132 feet by 45. "For two-thirds of its height the wall on the longer sides is unbroken, then there is a cornice, and, above this, six rounded windows." The middle space, immediately below the cornice, was devoted to the fresco scenes from the Old and New Testaments, six on each side. The lowest part of the walls, beneath the frescoes, was some thirty years later hung with tapestries from Raphael's designs. And in the upper part, above the cornice and between the windows, are the figures of the early Popes, which are continued also on the wall facing the altar. Several of these portraits have been attributed to Botticelli. There can be little doubt that the *Sixtus II.* (strongly recalling his *St. Augustine* in the Ognissanti), and the *St. Stephen Romanus*, are by his hand; possibly also the *St. Soter*, and *St. Evaristus*. Herr Steinmann thinks the portrait of Pope Cornelius was also Botticelli's work. And Dr. Ulmann sees traces of his intervention in the *St. Eutychianus* and *St. Calixtus*, though the greater part of these figures was executed by Fra Diamante.

In all probability these portraits occupied our artist through the summer of 1481, and the great biblical frescoes were not commenced until the late autumn of this year.

The central purpose of these scenes was to illustrate the parallel of the Old Law and the New—the religion

of Jehovah leading up to its full development in the Christian Revelation, this being perpetuated in the divine institution of the Church. The lives of three principal figures furnish the events: Christ, the centre and foundation; Moses, His antitype; Peter, His representative and successor. On the left wall (facing the altar) are six scenes from the Old Testament; on the right wall six from the New; and in every case, the "corresponding records," as Count Plunkett says, "face one another." Thus the *Covenant of Circumcision* (painted by Pinturicchio) faces and foreshadows the *Covenant of Baptism* (by the same master). The *Entrance on his Ministry by Moses*, otherwise known as *Scenes from the Early Life of Moses* (painted by Botticelli), corresponds to the *Entrance on His Ministry* by Christ, otherwise called the *Temptation of Christ* (also by Botticelli). *Moses by the Red Sea* (Piero di Cosimo) corresponds to *Christ by the Sea of Galilee*, otherwise known as the *Calling of the Apostles* (Domenico Ghirlandajo). In these two last-mentioned frescoes the deliverance of the Chosen People under the leadership of Moses from their bondage to the Egyptians prefigures the deliverance of the faithful under apostolic guidance from the dominion of heresies and false religions. The *Giving of the Law to the Israelites* (Cosimo Rosselli) corresponds to *The Sermon on the Mount* (by the same painter). *The Punishment of Core and his Associates*, who without divine warrant assumed to themselves the right of offering sacrifice (this fresco is Botticelli's third work) corresponds to the *Giving of the Keys to St. Peter*, which represents the divine institution of the Christian priesthood (this scene was painted by Perugino). And lastly, the *Testamentary Bequest and*

Death of Moses (of controverted authorship) corresponds to *The Last Supper* (by Cosimo Rosselli). Besides these twelve scenes covering the length of the side walls, there were originally three frescoes (attributed to Perugino) on the wall behind the altar—representing the *Assumption*, the *Finding of Moses*, and the *Nativity*—which in c. 1533 were defaced to make room for Michael Angelo's *Last Judgement*.

It is evident that the general scheme of subjects was the conception of one master-mind. Mr. Ruskin, in saying that the direction of the Sistine works was given to Botticelli, "as a theologian even more than as a painter," would seem to imply that this master-mind must have been his. But although there are grounds for accepting Vasari's statement that the superintendence of the work was intrusted to Botticelli, this can apply only to its decorative arrangement. The general outline of the subjects, in their doctrinal relation to one another, was probably supplied either by one of the papal theologians or by Sixtus himself. In accordance with the true principles of extensive mural decoration, each painter would have been given a definite subject as his share of the whole, and, within the limits imposed by the general artistic scheme, he would have been allowed considerable freedom in the mode of its interpretation.

As director of the entire work, Botticelli would have enjoyed a more unconditional freedom than any of his colleagues. He seems to have availed himself of it to the full, for his is the only work that shows any departure from the general arrangement. The right wall is devoted to scenes from the New Testament, the left to scenes from the Old. In Botticelli's *Temptation of Christ*—the



Alinari photo

THE TEMPTATION OF CHRIST

[Sistine Chapel, Vatican, Rome]

second scene from the altar on the right wall—two separate subjects are represented. Of these the principal one is the purification of a leper according to the Mosaic rite, the subject which gives its name to the fresco being relegated to small vignettes at the corners. The introduction into one fresco of two distinct themes which, according to the general scheme would have been more appropriately represented in two frescoes, may have originated in a characteristic desire on Botticelli's part to outdo his neighbours—"more particularly Domenico Ghirlandajo." In thus combining motives from both Testaments, it may be that he sought to achieve in a single fresco that juxtaposition of Old and New which the whole series was intended to illustrate. On the other hand, it is possible that this fresco, which seems to have been the first he executed, may have been undertaken before the present arrangement of the series had been adopted. The original plan may have been to represent *alternate* scenes from the Old and New Testaments, which would account for Botticelli having placed his *Purification of the Leper* next to Pinturicchio's *Baptism of Christ*. On this supposition the vignettes of *The Temptation* may have been added by the artist to bring his work into harmony with the readjusted plan of the whole.

Be this as it may, it must be admitted that this fresco, though containing ~~details~~ of incomparable beauty, presents an agglomeration of motives calling for all the elucidation that Professor Steinmann's studies have recently supplied.

The biblical text of Botticelli's work is to be found, as Professor Steinmann explains, in the Book of Le-

viticus, xiv. 2-7, where the sacrificial rites for the purification of leprosy are set forth. All the ceremonies here ordained find their place in the fresco; but by a necessity which considerably obscures the general effect, incidents that would actually happen successively are represented as happening simultaneously. In the central background appears the façade of a noble Renaissance building; beyond this is an idealized landscape of city, hills, and water. In front of the temple, in the open air, stands a Jewish altar, from which rise the fragrant fumes of burning cedarwood. Around it is grouped a crowd of figures—some kneeling in prayer, some standing by idly as spectators, other occupied in carrying out the ritual observances of the ceremony. On the right a woman approaches swiftly bringing the wood for the burnt-offering. In the left distance the leper's wife hastens to a fountain with two birds in a basket on her head; one of these is to be killed in "an earthen vessel over the running water," and the other to be dipped in the slain bird's blood. In the immediate foreground, before the altar, stands the High Priest, to whom a young assistant, clad in characteristic flowing vestments, brings a golden bowl containing the blood of sacrifice. In the right distance is seen the figure of the leper, supported by two friends, slowly and painfully approaching the altar of deliverance.

In vignettes at the sides—still ~~further complicating~~ this already somewhat overcharged scene—are introduced the episodes of Christ's temptation, which give the fresco its name, and serve, to some extent, to bring it into harmony with the New Testament series to which, from its location on the right wall, it naturally

belongs. The first temptation is represented on the left, where, under the shade of thick-grown olive trees, Satan, disguised as a Franciscan friar, stands by the Son of God and points to the stones at His feet. Immediately beneath this is another vignette of Christ attended by Angels. The second temptation is skilfully disposed on the pinnacle of the Renaissance temple, where the Evil One, again in the garb of a religious mendicant, invites the Saviour "to cast Himself down." The scene of the third temptation is an overhanging rock on the right where Christ hurls into space the vanquished tempter, who, now unfrocked, is revealed in all his natural hideousness. Behind are seen the angels "who came and ministered unto Him."

The connection here between the power of the Old Law to heal leprosy—the deadliest of physical evils—and the power of the New Law to conquer sin—the deadliest of spiritual evils—is obvious enough. But why should this subject have been chosen at all, a subject that had never before been represented in art? To this question Professor Steinmann has found the answer. Sixtus IV., who belonged to the Della Rovere family, had before his elevation to the Papacy been general of the Franciscans. This Order was in a special way dedicated to the care of the sick, as St. Francis had begun his mission by ministering to lepers. Sixtus as Pope had ~~devoted~~ much attention to embellishing the city of Rome and improving the condition of the people. Amongst other beneficial works he had erected the Hospital of S. Spirito, and founded a brotherhood to superintend its management and undertake the care of the sick and suffering. This building, since demolished,

was finished about the time that Botticelli arrived in Rome; and, from comparison with an ancient engraving still existing, it is evident that his Renaissance temple is an exact reproduction of it. The allusion now becomes clear. The fresco, which was placed in the space facing the pontifical throne, was intended to glorify the munificence of Sixtus, and to perpetuate his memory to his successors as a notable benefactor of the Roman people. This intention is further corroborated by the introduction of several oak trees—the badge of the Della Rovere.

It is not very clear why Botticelli should have vested Satan in the habit of the Order with which Sixtus was so closely associated. Perhaps a complimentary tribute to the Franciscans was intended by suggesting that the Evil One chose the most complete and misleading of all disguises. Or, on another interpretation, it may be that the artist—ever independent in spirit—was indulging in a veiled allusion to the undeniable corruption that invaded high and sacred offices.

Herr Steinmann thinks that many of the figures were portraits of the brethren of S. Spirito. The strong individualization of the heads certainly supports the theory of portraiture; but there is no evidence as yet forthcoming that would lead to their identification. It is generally supposed, however, that the ecclesiastic on the right foreground, holding a handkerchief, is Cardinal Giuliano della Rovere, who was afterwards Pope Julius II., and that the figure to the extreme right, grasping a sceptre of office, represents Girolamo Riario, the "much-hated," who had recently been raised by Sixtus to the dignity of Gonfaloniere of the Church.

The figure of the little half-naked boy holding an armful of grapes, and gazing down upon a (now almost effaced) serpent twined round his leg, is supposed by Professor Steinmann to have been derived from the antique statue of *The Child with a Serpent* in the Capitoline Museum. The similarity of motive and attitude is sufficient to warrant the supposition; and there are several other indications in his Sistine work that Botticelli was considerably influenced by the classical monuments of Rome.

His next fresco, illustrating scenes from the life of Moses, is by common consent the most beautiful of the three. Although no less than seven distinct episodes are introduced, they are so skilfully distributed—separated from each other, as Count Plunkett says, by a panelling of tree-stems—that there is no impression of confusion, and the general effect is clear and harmonious. One secret of Botticelli's success in the composition of this fresco is undoubtedly due to the fact that almost all the scenes consist of very few, or even of isolated, figures.

The setting is a hilly country wooded by tall trees in the foreground, and watered by a winding river that stretches into the distance. The episodes are arranged chronologically from right to left. In the right corner Moses is seen in the act of slaying the Egyptian who had struck "one of the Hebrews his brethren;" and behind them ~~the~~ injured Hebrew is supported in the arms of a woman. Beyond, and separated from this group by a colonnaded building, Moses flees into the desert to escape the vengeance of Pharaoh. In the central background, slightly to the right, he drives away the shepherds who disturbed the daughters of Jethro. Above

this, and slightly to the left, he appears—a solitary figure among the sheep on the hillside—"putting off the shoes from his feet." Further on, on an eminence to the extreme left, he kneels before the vision of Jehovah in the burning bush. Below, in the left foreground, the young Patriarch, at the head of his family and kinsfolk, leads his people out of Egypt.

These six episodes, all of momentous import in the life of the Leader of Israel, are grouped round a little scene in itself quite unimportant, almost commonplace, the relatively trivial incident of Moses watering the flocks of the daughters of Jethro. Who but Botticelli would have thus chosen his central motive, and what a consummate artist he shows himself by his choice! He might have given prominence to the dramatic action of Moses's wrath against the Egyptian; or to the pageantry of the processional exodus; or the religious awe of that solemn vocation from the voice of the flame-encircled Jehovah. But all these great events, rich in pictorial possibilities that would have tempted the skill of any lesser artist, Botticelli subordinates to this scene of quiet, pastoral beauty, to this action, so slight in itself, of simple human kindness, to this "moment of pause" in a life of mighty destinies. The well with its rounded stone parapet; the delicate lines of the pulley-ropes with the thick straight tree-stems behind; the young shepherdesses, naïve, almost uncouth, yet highly ornate in their unconscious charm of attitude; the thirsty sheep at the drinking-trough, and the figure of Moses, here clearly the forerunner of the Good Shepherd, bending over them as he pours out water from the well-bucket; these are the elements from which Botticelli has composed one of the most graceful idylls



Alinari photo

SCENES FROM THE LIFE OF MOSES

[Sistine Chapel, Vatican, Rome]

ever embodied in painting. The scene, though decoratively handled, is far simpler in sentiment than is usual with his work. At this time he must have been occupied with Old Testament reading, and was evidently impressed with the poetry, elementary in its large simplicity, of patriarchal pastoral life. The influence of the Hebraic ideal for a moment calms the uneasy classical longings of the true-born *quattrocentist*. In this little group by the well-side there is perfect harmony between the figures, the action, and the surroundings. Each element of the scene becomes expressive of the whole. And the pervading sense of quietude and refreshment, the coolness of secluded shade, the splash of falling water, give it a peculiar quality of restfulness that is without parallel in the whole of Botticelli's art.

In his third fresco, representing the *Punishment of Core* as related in the Book of Numbers, xvi., Botticelli shows himself a dramatic painter. Three separate episodes are represented. In the central background is a classic arch, evidently a reproduction of the Arch of Constantine. To the right a colonnade of Corinthian pillars with broken superstructure strongly resembles the ruined temple of Castor and Pollux in the Forum, of which only three columns are now standing. These architectural accessories, it may be incidentally remarked, are further evidence of the influence that his classical environment ~~exercised~~ on the artist's imagination.

In front of the arch, on which is graven the device, *Nemo sibi assumat honorem nisi vocatus a Deo tanquam Aron*, is placed a Jewish altar. Standing by the altar in the immediate foreground Moses, grasping in his raised right hand the rod of his divine office, calls down the venge-

ance of heaven on the rebellious men who without divine warrant had "assumed to themselves the honour" of offering incense in the temple. Round the altar are grouped the offenders in various attitudes of terror-stricken despair as they behold "a fire coming out from the Lord" to destroy them. Behind appears Aaron, the elect of Jehovah, who, wearing the triple tiara of his high-priesthood, calmly raises his thurible of incense. To Moses's right Eleazar "scatters the fire" from the desecrators' censers.

The scene is powerfully conceived and vividly realized. It is full of movement and passion, and yet, would it not have gained somewhat by a more rigid restraint? The figure of Moses, so much extolled by Professor Steinmann as an embodiment of kingly dignity, is undoubtedly imposing, but the attitude is so intensely dramatic as to be almost theatrical in its effect. The lines of the Patriarch's drapery are quite faultless, but they are too studied, and the toga-like arrangement of the folds too evidently suggests careful emulation of some classic statue. In quiet dignity the central figure is surpassed by that of Aaron, who, relegated to a secondary place, is superb in the venerable tranquillity of his divinely-confirmed ministry.

To the left of this group Moses again appears challenging the leaders of the rebellion—Core, Dathan and Abiram—to prove their claim, and "immediately as he made an end of speaking, the earth broke asunder under their feet . . . and devoured them . . . and they went down alive into hell." The two figures supported on clouds over the yawning chasm are supposed by Professor Steinmann to represent Eldad and Medad, who,



Alinari photo

THE PUNISHMENT OF CORE

Sistine Chapel, Vatican, Rome

wrongly denounced as false prophets (Numbers, xi. 26-29), were ratified in their gift by Moses because "the spirit had rested upon them."

The episode on the right represents Moses at the head of a crowd of Israelites armed with stones delivering judgement on "one who had blasphemed the name of the Lord," and whom the divine command had ordained "to be stoned by the people" (Leviticus, xxiv. 14, 23). This scene, according to Professor Steinmann, had a special reference to the schismatic revolt of Andrea Zamometic, Archbishop of Krain, who in March, 1482, had openly rebelled against the papal authority, and in December of the same year was committed to prison at Basle, where he afterwards killed himself. The allusion fixes the date of the fresco as subsequent to December, 1482, and confirms the supposition—based partly on its position, partly on technical indications—that it was the last in execution of Botticelli's three Sistine masterpieces.

The Sistine frescoes occupy a middle point in Botticelli's artistic activity, and the types he has introduced in them resume much that he had already done and much that he was yet to do. For example, the woman in the right foreground of *The Temptation of Christ* recalls the Graces in the *Primavera*. The female profile, with uplifted glance, on the left in the same fresco, resembles the St. Catherine in the later S. Barnaba altarpiece. The type of the next figure, gazing downwards, is an adaptation of the *Magnificat Madonna*, and is itself adapted in some of Botticelli's later angels' heads. In the daughters of Jethro we see how the type which the artist subsequently gave to the Graces in the Lemmi fresco was already slowly forming in his imagination.

And in a woman towards the rear of Moses's procession (in the second fresco) he reproduces the type of one of the angels of the *Magnificat*—a type which, variously modified, afterwards reappears in some of his Madonnas, and also in his Venus rising from the sea. For the first time, in *The Temptation of Christ*, his angels are winged—a rendering that from now onwards he does not depart from. Unwinged angels would hardly have been acceptable to the theological minds of his employers, and it may be that a concession to orthodoxy first led him to modify his original conception in this respect.

The study of the Sistine frescoes rather points to the conclusion that while in general Botticelli's female heads were idealized types—often subtle variations of the same type—his male heads were, for the most part, derived from actual portraiture. Some of his models he may have found amongst the company of his fellow-workers and their assistants, a supposition which the prevalence of a Florentine type tends to confirm. The young soldier in Moses's procession is thought by Professor Steinmann to be a portrait of Piero di Cosimo, and the second figure in the line of spectators in *The Punishment of Core*, has been imagined by the same writer to be a portrait of the artist himself. There are, however, very little grounds for this latter assumption, as the head in question does not sufficiently resemble either the portrait in the *Adoration* or Filippino's portrait of his master in the Brancacci Chapel. It also seems too young for a man who was now nearing his fortieth year.

The comparison of Botticelli's Sistine work with that of his collaborators, reveals all the perfections and the

imperfections of his style. In beauty of detail, purity of line, and the decorative treatment of isolated motives, whether figures or accessories, Botticelli far surpasses all his colleagues. In subtlety of feeling and intensity of passion, as well as in vivacity of gesture and movement and the expression of animated and agitated human life, he here, as elsewhere, appears without a rival. In unity of composition, however, in synthetic power, and in that quality of monumental grandeur which is so important an element in mural decoration, Botticelli is distinctly inferior to Ghirlandajo. In space composition and aerial perspective, in rendering the idea of spaciousness—free, unencumbered, “pleasantly empty,” in that sense of vastness which is so delightful to the eye and so stimulative to the imagination, Botticelli’s work cannot for a moment be compared to Perugino’s *Delivery of the Keys to St. Peter*.

The *Anonimo* tells us that while Botticelli was in Rome he painted an *Adoration of the Magi*, which was one of his best works. This picture is generally identified with the *Adoration* now in the Hermitage at St. Petersburg. I have not seen the original; but as far as one may judge from reproductions, it certainly seems to belong to the Master’s Roman period. The character of the heads, the attitudes and distribution of the figures, the treatment of the background, and the introduction of oak trees, offer many points of resemblance to the Sistine frescoes; and the ruined, weed-grown arch in the left-hand corner evidently had its prototype in the Roman Campagna. The St. Petersburg panel seems to me, however, inferior in merit, both to Botticelli’s Sistine work and to his *Adoration* in the Uffizi.

On his return from Rome to Florence he was delayed at Volterra by an order from Lorenzo dei Medici to decorate the latter's villa of Lo Spedaletto with some classical frescoes.

CHAPTER VI

WORKS ATTRIBUTABLE TO 1484-1490

BOTTICELLI returned to Florence some time in 1484, probably in the earlier part of the year. No trace of his frescoes at Volterra has as yet been found, and we have no evidence as to their extent, or the length of time their execution would have taken. According to Vasari, Botticelli left Rome very soon after the completion of the Sistine decorations, in August, 1483. Allowing that he was working for seven or eight months at Volterra—where his labours were supplemented by those of several of the Sistine painters—he would still have been able to return to Florence by May, 1484.

It must have been immediately after his return, I think, that he painted *The Birth of Venus* (Uffizi, No. 39), his greatest masterpiece of lineal decoration. The date of this picture is, however, controverted. Vasari has mentioned it in the same phrase as the *Primavera*, apparently because both works contain the figure of Venus (though how differently treated!) and both were for a time located in the Medici Villa at Castello. This purely accidental association led some writers into the mistake of assuming that the two were companion pictures belonging

to the same period. There are no grounds for this assumption, and later criticism has rejected it. The pictures do not correspond in size; the *Primavera* is painted on wood, *The Birth of Venus* on canvas, and they show little or no affinity of type. Although both were undoubtedly painted for Lorenzo, and both were derived from motives of classic imagery, the differences of treatment and *touch* between the two are so great as to indicate that they were separated by several years of artistic development. The *Primavera* is now generally considered a work of 1478. All Botticelli's critics are agreed that *The Birth of Venus* was not painted *earlier* than 1480. The point at issue is whether it was executed before or after his visit to Rome. Signor Supino refers it to 1483-1485, but only on the grounds of its alleged relation to the *Primavera*, which he considers a work of the Eighties. Professor Warburg, who has devoted special study to this picture, dates it *c.* 1483. Dr. Julius Meyer, on the other hand, assigns it to 1480, a year when it would seem that Botticelli must have been fully occupied with the *Pallas* and the *St. Augustine*. Mr. Berenson thinks it was painted in the early part of 1482, but before the Sistine frescoes. It has never been suggested, nor is it credible, that this picture, evidently painted to the order, and inspired by the intellectual *entourage*, of Lorenzo the Magnificent, was executed during Botticelli's sojourn at Rome. Therefore, unless the chronology of his Roman visit is to be again readjusted, *The Birth of Venus* must either have been painted before 1482, or after his return from Rome in 1484.

Of these two alternatives I incline to the latter for the following reasons: In the first place, although never,



Walker & Cockerell photo

BIRTH OF VENUS

[Uffizi Gallery, Florence]

perhaps, were lines more delicately traced than those of Venus's shell, yet considered as a whole, the picture does not show the careful and elaborate finish that characterizes all Botticelli's earlier works. It is more highly summarized, less minutely detailed. There is greater ease, and suppleness, a more exuberant flow of line balanced into a more perfect rhythm, a swifter touch, more spontaneous, less deliberate. In a word, *The Birth of Venus* shows all the qualities that a *tempera* painter whose bent was towards lineal design might be expected to develop by a long exercise in fresco work. Secondly, in his types Botticelli has here achieved the perfect oval form towards which he had long been tending, and which distinguishes most of his work of the Eighties, but which does not appear so fully developed, either in the Sistine frescoes or in any picture anterior to his Roman work. Thirdly, Herr Julius Meyer has drawn attention to the increasing subjectivity, the solemnity of sentiment, the depth of melancholy earnestness, which characterizes all Botticelli's later works. In this purely decorative picture, which entrances us by its beauty of line, and seems to aim only at an aesthetic ideal, the artist has nevertheless invested the Goddess of Pleasure with a poignancy of sadness, which is paralleled indeed in some of his later religious pictures, but which is quite foreign to the spirit of his previous decorative work, and is of a different quality from the resigned melancholy of his earlier Madonnas.

It has been suggested that Botticelli may have become acquainted with the myth of Venus Anadyomene—Aphrodite rising from the sea—through the Homeric Hymns, an edition of which was published in 1488 from

a Florentine MS. of much older date. This may be so ; though it is probable that he owed his classical knowledge as much to men as to books. In the company of such scholars as Poliziano—who had himself written some verses in praise of Venus Anadyomene¹—the artist would have had every opportunity to become imbued with antique legendary lore. In any case, whatever the source of his information, his version of the myth is entirely individual and original. Here, as in all his decorative work, his starting-point was poetry ; his goal, creative design ; and in following his inspiration he is quite untroubled by any regard for historical or literary accuracy.

In the Homeric account Venus is wafted to land by Zephyrus, and received by the Hours. For considerations of decorative effect, Botticelli quite unconcernedly duplicates the figure of Zephyrus into the intertwined forms of Zephyrus and Zephyritis, and produces a design of living lines that has never been equalled in painting. His treatment of this group seems undoubtedly to have been influenced, or even inspired, by a passage in Leon Battista Alberti's "Libro di Pittura," where the author, dealing with movement, makes a special reference to the ideal figures of the Zephyrs with their wind-blown hair and draperies. All that Alberti here suggests, and more, has been accomplished by Botticelli. It may perhaps be questioned—though in the presence of such incomparable beauty questionings are somewhat out of place—whether the posture of the winged figures is anatomically quite convincing, except on the assumption of an unusual plasticity of limb. Plasticity may well be con-

¹ *Vide* "Stanze per la Giostra," Lib. I., 99-103.

ceded, however, to the genii of the wind. As an expression of light, rushing movement—the spirit of spring breezes incarnate—Botticelli's group of Zephyrs is without a rival in art.

The Homeric Hours he reduces to a single figure, who is generally supposed to represent Spring. She is clad in a flower-embroidered robe like that of the Spring-maiden in *Primavera*, but she does not otherwise resemble that fantastic creation. In type she has more in common with some of the Sistine heads; in pose she recalls the young acolyte in the *Temptation*, as with light, tripping step she advances to the shore beneath the orange trees to meet the regal nudity slowly approaching from the sea.

The consummate art of the picture, apart from its abstract beauty of line, lies in the diversity of movements it embodies: the Zephyrs sweeping through the air; Venus, stately and passive, gliding, swan-like, across the water; the nymph advancing with brisk, buoyant tread, her delicate feet barely touching the ground, and the large mantle she holds flapping in the wind like a great wing beside her. Each motive of the scene is thus identified with a particular kind of movement, and while each enhances the effect of the others, all tend to accentuate the force of the morning breeze, and combine to produce an indescribable impression of freshness, exhilaration, and life.

Botticelli is supposed by Dr. Julius Meyer to have modelled his Venus on an antique statue belonging to the Medici. This statue was described as early as 1375 by a Bolognese scholar, Benvenuto Rambaldi, who had seen it in the course of a visit to Florence and the

description, still extant, exactly corresponds with the form and attitude of the central figure in *The Birth of Venus*. Why is it that, having taken the faultlessly moulded limbs, Botticelli did not also take the placid, expressionless face which belongs to the classical conception of Venus? Why did he invest his "white Greek goddess" with this troubled, spiritualized beauty of feature "into which the soul with all its maladies has passed"? Did he mean to accentuate the *forlornness* of this immortal wanderer "separated from her true home by a yawning chasm, wherein the old faiths lay buried, and whence Christ had arisen"? Did he mean to portray her as an alien and an outcast, returning after centuries of exile to a world where her presence was no longer a glory but a sin; where, perennially young and perpetually desired, she was nevertheless to be perpetually in disgrace? Or on the other hand, is her piteousness but the mute appeal of a thwarted soul craving for some part in the great new spiritual destiny of which her life in its very essence is recognized as the time-honoured antithesis?

It is easy, dangerously easy, to read into a work of art meanings which cannot legitimately be attributed to the conscious intention of the artist. One touch of deep subjectivity, in a work wholly and essentially decorative, is hardly entitled to rank as more than an accident. It may be a happy accident bringing in an added element of poetic suggestiveness; but it is still only a delightful accessory, non-essential to the main purpose. *The Birth of Venus* is Botticelli's greatest masterpiece in decorative design; and it is for its unique decorative qualities that we primarily value the picture. In executing it we may

well believe that all the artist's enthusiasm was concentrated, undivided and entire, upon a purely artistic aim. Yet it is useless to deny that the spirit of his age, in all its most highly intellectualized sentiment, was upon him when he painted his *Venus*, and, unconsciously perhaps to himself, directed his hand. Interpreted in the light of later culture, his picture has acquired a secondary value as a record of the irruption of the Antique upon the imagination of the Middle Age; and the psychological student of art prizes it as a monument to that momentous meeting of Classicism and Mediaevalism, which generated the complex spirit of modern life and thought.

The colouring of *The Birth of Venus* is pale and cold. It may have faded somewhat by time, but the light was probably always that of a "sunless dawn." The colours, pallid as they are, are exquisitely blended; the light lilac and olive-green draperies of the Zephyrs, the nymph's flowing white robe embroidered in cornflowers, the faded pink of the large mantle, the stretch of dull-green water and the cheerless sky, all combine to throw into relief the delicate ivory limbs of the goddess that seem to grow out of her ivory, gold-tipped shell.

In the first half of 1485 Botticelli was at work upon a *Madonna and Child with SS. John Evangelist and John Baptist* (now in the Berlin Gallery, No. 106). It was a commission for Agnolo dei Bardi, a Florentine magnate, who ordered it for his chapel in the Church of S. Spirito. It is one of the very few of Botticelli's works about which documentary evidence has been produced. In the "Quaderno di Cassa" of the said Agnolo, still preserved in the archives of the Guicciardini family at

Florence, there is mentioned a payment made on February 7th, 1485, to the carpenter who supplied the wood panel, "per Sandro del Botticiello"; and a second entry, dated August 3rd in the same year, records the payment "a chappella di S. Spirito" of seventy-five gold florins "contanti" to Sandro del Botticiello—being forty florins for his materials, and thirty-five for the work of his brush.

The composition of this picture is severely symmetrical, showing the tendency towards a more conventional arrangement which appears in many of Botticelli's later works. The treatment of the accessories is, however, highly individual and reveals all the Master's characteristic love for elaborate ornamentation, as well as his keen appreciation of the beauty of nature. The scene is laid in a quiet, secluded garden, where, on a raised marble bench the Madonna and Child are enthroned in the centre of the picture, with the Evangelist on their left and the Baptist on their right. The entire background is filled by three bower-like niches of thickly woven foliage which, in lieu of marble canopies, shelter the three figures: plaited palm branches for the Madonna, cypress boughs for the Baptist, and myrtle for the Evangelist. Bowls of roses and vases with lilies and olive sprays are placed on the richly-chiselled marble balustrade; and innumerable flowers peer up from the grass below and caress the sculptured stone-work at the Madonna's feet. All this delicate beauty of detail, all the sense of freshness and repose in the surroundings, only serves to enhance the expression of human suffering in the figures. The Madonna, whose oval type resembles that of Venus, is the most dejected of all



Walker & Cockerell photo]

[Berlin Gallery

MADONNA AND CHILD WITH SAINTS

THE "BARDI" MADONNA

Botticelli's Madonnas ; and yet—erect, patient, passive—she is solemn in her very dejection. The Evangelist is represented as an old man with strained, anxious, thought-furrowed face that speaks of intellectual perplexities and spiritual wrestlings—the “burden of the mystery” faithfully borne with no ray of inspiration to lighten it. One is tempted to conjecture that the artist must have found his model for this figure in the statue of some ancient philosopher. In the emaciated form of the Baptist Botticelli has created a type of the ascetic in which all the physical distress of asceticism is accentuated. The earnest, wistful eyes—the eyes of the Centaur in *Pallas*—gaze out of the picture with something of the pathetic appeal one sometimes sees in the eyes of a stricken animal. They tell of an unspoken, an unspeakable, pain—a pain there is no hope and no effort to remedy.

All this intensity of emotion is rendered with such admirable restraint, its expression is so passionless, the figures are so passive and immobile, that the picture acquires a peculiar quality of sustained quietude, almost fatalistic in character. In strongest contrast with this immobility is the happy, innocent life of the Holy Child. He is no longer the inspired Child of the *Magnificat*, but a simple, playful, little human baby, for Whose sake, nevertheless, His servants acquiesce in almost superhuman sacrifices.

We now come to two pictures, allied together by a certain community of type and feeling, and both executed, I believe, within a short time of *The Birth of Venus*. These are, the *tondo* of *Our Lady surrounded by Angels*, known as the *Melagrana Madonna* (Uffizi, No. 1289),

and the large altar-piece of the *Madonna with Angels and Saints*, known as the *Madonna of S. Barnaba* (Accademia, Florence, No. 85).

The *Madonna della Melagrana* (so called from the *melagrana*, or pomegranate, the Holy Child plays with) has been considered by some writers to be a relatively early work of our artist. Dr. Ulmann has placed it as early as *c.* 1475. The comparison of this *tondo* with that of the *Magnificat* (and their close proximity in the same room at the Uffizi offers exceptional facilities for comparing them), can leave little doubt, I think, that the *Melagrana* was the later of the two in execution. The *Magnificat* is of all Botticelli's works the most highly and finely finished. The *Melagrana*, on the contrary, shows the less precise, less minute touch, the broader and more summarized treatment (very noticeable in the hair) that is distinctive of his later work. The drawing, too, is less careful; and though very beautiful, the *Melagrana* is technically inferior to the *Magnificat*. The colouring of the two panels is similar, but lower-toned and more sombre in the *Melagrana*. Colour is, however, not much of a criterion with Botticelli; for, within certain limits, it varies considerably in works of the same period, while some of his latest pictures reproduce the colour schemes of comparatively early ones. There is some indication that in painting the *Melagrana* Botticelli borrowed from his earlier *tondo*. The two angels nearest the Madonna, on the right of the picture, are closely derived from the *Magnificat* angels; and the Madonna's kerchief and veil, though differently folded, are otherwise identical in both pictures. But in feeling these two works are entirely different.



Walker & Cockerell photo]

[Uffizi Gallery, Florence

THE MADONNA AND CHILD

THE "MELAGRANA" MADONNA

The *Melagrana tondo* shows that emphasized sense of human deprivation which characterizes Botticelli's religious conceptions of the first half of the Eighties. In returning to his old theme of Our Lady enthroned among angels, he represents it in an indeterminate region which is neither heaven nor earth. A celestial light falls on her from above; but her thoughts seem rather occupied with the things of earth. This woe-begone Madonna, wistful beyond all his other Madonnas, is possessed by a melancholy which is not only that of apprehension for what is inevitably coming, but also of vague regret for what has been irrevocably missed. She is not only surveying the sorrow that awaits her in the future, the agony of the Pietà, the pain that is part of her love for her Divine Child; she is also measuring the sacrifice of the present—the renunciation of all the natural joys of life and youth that are incompatible with her miraculous motherhood. She does not heed the sweet grace of her Babe, and His delicate little body seems to lie like a burden upon her. Enthroned in her high distinction, she does not think of the exalted pre-eminence that has raised her *above* all other created beings, but only of the human loneliness of a unique destiny that has made her *unlike* all others. Her forlornness is the counterpart of the forlornness of Venus Anadyomene, whose features with but slight variations she reproduces, whose piteousness she reiterates and intensifies.

It may be worth while in passing to mention another circumstance, which though of minor importance in itself, tends to confirm the attribution of the *Melagrana tondo* to c. 1484-1485. In Botticelli's earlier works it is very rare to find any important figure represented full-face

with eyes looking out of the picture. The only noteworthy instance occurring before 1481 is that of the Spring-maiden in *Primavera*; but this figure, both in type and expression, is unlike anything he did either before or after. All his earlier Madonnas without exception—the “Chigi” *Madonna*, the *Magnificat*, the Madonnas in the *Adorations*, etc.—are represented with bent head and downcast eyelids that almost entirely conceal the eyes. We are never brought quite directly face to face with her. In the more humanistic rendering of the *Melagrana*, she appears almost full face, with wide-open eyes that gaze straight out of the picture like those of Venus Anadyomene. This same full, large-eyed gaze, only even fuller and more level—the eyes directly meeting our eyes—occurs again in the *Madonna of S. Barnaba*, and repeats the earnest, compelling appeal of the Baptist in the Berlin picture, a work which we know to belong to the year 1485.

Vasari has mentioned as a work “of Sandro’s hand,” a *tondo* of the Madonna with several angels which hung in the Church of S. Francesco, outside the gate of S. Miniato, and which was considered “cosa bellissima.” This *tondo* is generally identified with the *Madonna of the Melagrana*. In connection with this picture Vasari further tells us that a certain Biagio, one of Botticelli’s many *scolari*, had executed a *tondo* in imitation of it, which became the subject of one of the master’s practical jokes.¹ This

¹ Vasari relates how, in Biagio’s absence from the studio, Sandro gleefully made eight little caps of scarlet paper, which by means of soft wax he fixed on the heads of Biagio’s eight angels. He was rewarded for his pains by Biagio’s intense bewilderment when on his return he found his angels suddenly transformed into commonplace Florentine citizens. It took little to effect this transformation!

replica (with variations) is probably none other than the *tondo*—with eight angels instead of six—from the Raczynski collection now in the Berlin Gallery. It is a very mediocre work, in parts very ill-drawn, throughout lifeless, showing the vain attempt of an inferior artist to imitate all that is most inimitable in the master's style. It is a curious instance of the slovenly work which, even in the zenith of his career, Botticelli allowed to issue from his workshop. It was, perhaps, for this reason that he considered it a suitable subject for friendly jesting.

The same note of mournful yearning which characterizes the *Melagrana tondo* reverberates through the large altar-piece of the *Madonna enthroned amongst Angels and Saints*, which Botticelli painted for the convent church of St. Barnabas. This picture is rather a difficult one to date, and the difficulty is increased by the effects of injudicious restoration. I am not sure if I am right in placing it as late as 1485. Its intense subjectivity of feeling, far removed from the prevailing tenor of the period of the *Magnificat*, would seem to locate it among the artist's more thoughtful work of the Eighties. This large-eyed, plaintive Madonna has more in common—even in type as well as very obviously in expression—with the Venus Anadyomene and the Madonnas of the *Melagrana tondo* and the Berlin picture, than with any other of Botticelli's creations. That she does not resemble them more closely is due, I believe, to the artist having here deliberately modified the type in order to produce a likeness between mother and child. The Holy Child resembles both Moses's little son in the Sistine fresco, and the little Cupid (now half effaced) in the fresco of *Lorenzo Tornabuoni with the Liberal Arts*,

from the Villa Lemmi. The angels—here winged, as is the case in all Botticelli's post-Sistine work—are distantly derived from the angels of the *Magnificat*; but they are much more closely allied to the angels of his later works, and they are already leading up to the types he gave to some of the figures of the *Liberal Arts* (1486). These points all tend to locate the picture in the Eighties. At the same time it cannot be denied that the drawing of the hands and feet, which are clumsily modelled, and in some figures disproportionately large, shows the faults of an earlier period, and is very different from the exceedingly delicate treatment of hands and feet in *The Birth of Venus* and the *Berlin Madonna*. But I am in doubt how far this is a trustworthy indication; for in the large *Coronation* from S. Marco, belonging, as I believe, to an even later date, these same gouty hands reappear in the figures of the four saints in the lower portion of the picture, while in the choir of angels in the upper portion we find the hands and feet modelled with great delicacy. The figure, too, of St. Catherine, heavily and ungracefully draped, shows the "exaggerated hip curve" which has been associated with the artist's earlier efforts. But this again is hardly conclusive evidence, for this same exaggerated hip curve, which for a time disappeared from his work, suddenly re-occurs in one of the figures of the *Graces* in the Lemmi fresco of Giovanna Tornabuoni. Whether or no the S. Barnaba altar-piece is to be dated earlier than 1485-1486, it cannot, I think, be dated much later. Herr Steinmann's suggestion that it belongs to the next decade and was painted under the influence of Savonarola's sermons, seems to me altogether improbable, if only on the score of the



Alinari photo]

[Academy, Florence

THE MADONNA DI S. BARNABA

humanistic rendering of the central figure. We may feel sure that it was not in this purely human aspect that the fervent Dominican portrayed the sorrows of Mary.

The composition of this altar-piece is harmonious and imposing. The introduction of four attendant angels—two of whom hold back the curtains of the baldacchino, while the others display the instruments of the Passion—is a characteristic innovation which breaks the monotony of a somewhat conventionally planned design. Without disturbing the harmony of the whole, the artist has clearly differentiated between the living figures in the foreground, and the ideal vision of the Madonna and Child with the ministering angels above. They too are living—all Botticelli's figures are living figures; but they are animated by a different order of life. Enthroned, statue-like, in her marble shrine, the Madonna is present not as a personality, but a personification, the embodiment of her servants' contemplations, a statue come to life. It would seem that she is invisible to them, or visible only as an inanimate image, for they are turned from her as if unconscious of her presence amongst them. By a subtly suggested distinction, we are made to feel that she is separated from them by the gulf that separates a subjective from an objective existence.

The six saints are rendered with great life and vigour. Strongly characterized, they represent types of different aspects of the religious life: St. Barnabas, the eager, dogmatic controversialist; St. John Baptist, the wasted, distressed ascetic; SS. Ambrose and Augustine, the faintly ecclesiastical dignitary,—meek, heavy figures, seemingly oppressed with the weight of authority which

as Bishops and Fathers of the Church they wield ; St. Catherine, the ecstatic ; and lastly, St. Michael, whose rôle is not quite so clearly defined. This winged, curly-headed young warrior, whose delicate boyish face is clouded by an expression of pitiful, mystified wonderment, is a very winsome, if a somewhat effeminate figure ; but he is not an orthodox nor even a very appropriate rendering of the Leader of the celestial hosts. It is the only occasion on which he appears in Botticelli's art ; and it may be that his archangelic personality was a little outside the range of our painter's humanistic sympathies. Certainly it is not as the heavenly champion of the Church Militant, but rather as a compassionate, disinterested, and, despite his armour, a somewhat helpless spectator of her struggles and her sufferings 'that Botticelli has here portrayed him.

The colours of the altar-piece are brilliant, transparent, but not very harmoniously blended. The great variety of clear bright tones employed results in a rather harsh, restless effect, which may be due in part, but not altogether, to the ingenuity of subsequent repaintings.

In the Academy at Florence are four small panels representing respectively : (No. 157) *Christ Rising from the Tomb* ; (No. 158) *The Death of St. Ambrose* ; (No. 161) *Salome with the Head of the Baptist* ; (No. 162) *The Vision of St. Augustine*. Their size and shape indicate that they originally formed the *predella* of an altar-piece ; and as they are known to have come from the Convent of S. Barnaba, and as in subject they are related to the Saints in Botticelli's S. Barnaba Madonna, there can be little doubt that this was the altar-piece to

which they originally belonged. In various details—the type and draperies of Salome, the couch on which St. Ambrose lies, etc.—they show evidences of Botticelli's later manner, and thus support the theory that the altarpiece was painted after his return from Rome.

In 1486, on the occasion of the marriage of Lorenzo Tornabuoni with Giovanna degli Albizzi, Botticelli was commissioned by Giovanni Tornabuoni, father of the bridegroom, to decorate a room in the Tornabuoni villa at Chiasso Macerelli, near Fiesole. The Tornabuoni, who were closely related to the Medici, were notable patrons of the fine arts. It was to their order that a year or so later Ghirlandajo executed his famous frescoes in Sta. Maria Novella, in which several portraits of their family are introduced. In celebration of their important alliance with the Albizzi they now turned to Ghirlandajo to commemorate the event on the walls of their chapel at Chiasso Macerelli; while, with a similar purpose in view, they confided the adornment of a room on the first floor of the villa to the decorative skill of Botticelli.

Botticelli's work was for many years lost sight of. In 1541 the villa passed out of the possession of the Tornabuoni; and at some subsequent date the room he had painted was whitewashed, and the frescoes were entirely concealed. In 1873—the villa then being the property of Dr. Lemmi—some traces of colour were observed through cracks in the external plaster. The whitewash was carefully removed, with the result that Botticelli's paintings were brought to light. Of the entire decoration, it was only possible to save two scenes. A third—representing apparently an old man embracing some children—fell to pieces soon after it was uncovered. The

two scenes still existing were then detached from the walls, sold to a foreign dealer, and in 1882 made their appearance at the Louvre, where they now ornament the landing of one of the principal staircases.

These two frescoes, imagined with all Botticelli's talent for graceful adulation, respectively represent Giovanna Tornabuoni receiving the tribute of Venus and the three Graces, and Lorenzo Tornabuoni being conducted by Dialectic to the domain of Philosophy and the Liberal Arts. The former, much the more beautiful of the two, is unfortunately the less well preserved. The figure of Giovanna, with her sweet grave face and severely quiet attitude, is undoubtedly a portrait. It has been identified as such by its resemblance both to Niccolò Fiorentino's medal of Giovanna and to the portrait Ghirlandajo introduced into his fresco, *The Visitation*, at Sta. Maria Novella. The four figures who approach her with offerings have been variously interpreted as representing the four cardinal virtues and Venus with the three Graces. The former may be, as Herr Steinmann suggests, the more appropriate reading, "wegen des inneren Zusammenhangs mit dem ersten Bilde," in regard to its subjective relation to the other picture; but there can, I think, be little doubt that the latter is the correct reading. The leading figure of the four—she to the right in the first pair—is clearly marked out as distinct from the other three. Alone of the four her feet are covered; her robe alone is embroidered with an elaborate device, now almost entirely effaced, in gold; and in type she is much more queenly and commanding than her companions, who closely resemble one another. This distinction would not have been appropriate in the case of



GIOVANNA TORNABUONI, WITH VENUS AND THE GRACES

[Louvre, Paris]

the cardinal virtues, which would, apparently, all have been estimated as of equal importance. The appearance, too, of a little Cupid with his bow in the corner of the fresco, seems to argue the vicinity of Venus; and that Giovanna was associated with the three Graces is evident from Niccolo Fiorentino's medal, on the reverse of which the Graces are figured with the subscription, "Castitas, Pulchritudo, Amor."

The suggestion that these four charming figures are portraits of leading members of the Tornabuoni family seems to me rather improbable. They have far more the character of idealized types than of actual portraiture; and they express a type towards which some of Botticelli's previous heads were already tending. It is also more consonant with the generally poetical character of his decorative work that he should not have pushed his allegory too far—or made his intention too obvious—by translating it altogether into the terms of portraiture. Ghirlandajo, who was not a poetical painter, did this; Botticelli did not: it is one of their many differences. At the same time, the pointed chin which characterizes all these figures, and which now appears I think, for the first time in his art, was in all likelihood derived from some living model. Throughout his work it seems probable that the visions of his imagination were modified by his observation of life, just as his observation of life was idealized by his imagination. Whoever they represent, these figures are certainly among his most delightful creations; and the scene in which he has commemorated the demure, graciousness of Giovanna is one of the finest masterpieces of his art.

The second fresco is better preserved, and less attractive—so much less attractive that some critics have inferred that it is not by the master's hand. The colouring, it is true, is somewhat heavy, and lacking in the exquisite delicacy of the "Giovanna" fresco, and the outlines are rather aggressively obvious. But the latter is not an unprecedented feature of Botticelli's work, and his colour is at all times a variable quantity. The difference between the two seems to be due to the less propitious subject of the second; and it must be admitted that in *Lorenzo with the Liberal Arts*, the artist has handled a crude allegory and a difficult composition with consummate mastery and skill. In a retired nook, hedged round by a thick forest, Dame Philosophy holds her rural court. Around her are grouped her servants, the Liberal Arts—sweet girlish figures, mediaeval in character and rendered with classic grace. Each is accompanied by her symbol: Geometry with her rule; Astronomy with her globe; Music with a diminutive organ; Arithmetic with her table of figures; Grammar with scorpion and switch; Rhetoric with a half unfurled scroll. To this staid and scholarly company, the figure of Dialectic—the seventh Liberal Art—represented as a coy and persuasive maiden, leads the hero of the scene, Lorenzo Tornabuoni, famed among his contemporaries for his great learning, his studious habits, and the modesty of his scholarship. In its grace of attitude, and the charm of its naïve seriousness, this fresco is fully worthy of Botticelli. Who else among the artists of the day could have given so delightful a rendering to so dry a theme?

The four panels representing scenes from Boccaccio's



[Louvre, Paris]

LORENZO TORNA BUONI AND THE SEVEN LIBERAL ARTS

story of Nastagio degli Onesti, which, according to Vasari, Botticelli painted for the Pucci family, belong to this period. These panels, which passed from Casa Pucci to Mr. Leyland's collection, and are now at Lyons, were evidently destined for a *cassone di corredo*, or bridal chest, and were probably commissioned in 1487 on the occasion of the marriage of Lucrezia Pucci and Pier Francesco Bini. They are Botticellesque in character, and there can be little doubt that they were executed in Botticelli's workshop; but it is open to question whether they were the work of the Master himself. Morelli believed them to be authentic works of our artist, but they are not included in Mr. Berenson's list, and later criticism tends to assign their execution to one of Botticelli's many assistants.

The little *tondo* of the *Madonna and Child with Angels* in the Ambrosiana at Milan is a humanized version of the theme to which Botticelli in the course of his career again and again reverts. The tent-like baldacchino with its curtains held back by angels is evidently derived from the S. Barnaba altar-piece, and also recalls the arrangement of the early *Holofernes*. The marble bench and parapet with pleasant landscape beyond are repeated, variously adapted, in many works of his followers. The Holy Child resembles somewhat the Child in the *Magnificat* less delicately rendered; but the angels, very unethereal despite their aureoles and wings, are far removed from the angelic children of the earlier *tondo*. Their fluttering draperies show the sweeping arabesques, the almost reckless display of ornamental line that characterizes the Master's later period. The Madonna, on the contrary, while resembling the *Mag-*

nificat Madonna, is far more refined and spiritualized. Though developed from the earlier type, this type has yet become so transformed in process of development, that it stands out now as almost a new creation. The melancholy that is so rarely absent from his Madonnas is here subdued by maternal love and religious adoration. And although the subject of the picture accentuates the human relation of Mother and Child, yet of all Botticelli's Madonnas she is the most virginal, the most nearly approaching a Christian ideal of Mary.

It is somewhat difficult to account for this change which, if the *tondo* could with probability be placed in the Nineties, would naturally be attributed to the influence of Savonarola. But though clearly belonging to Botticelli's later work, it does not show any of the haste and impatience, or the technical evidences of declining power that mark his latest work. It may be that the more earthly rendering of his recent Madonnas had not met with unqualified approval, and that he changed his manner to suit the taste of more devotionally inclined patrons. Or perhaps the reality of life had entered here as an influence that corrected the *prejugés* of the idealist. It may be that in painting the sweet grave innocence of Giovanna Tornabuoni, the artist's sympathies were awakened to a new aspect of life, that the suggestion of higher and purer conceptions came to him, and brought a new quality into his art. Be this as it may, his *Ambrosiana Madonna* fixed a type which reappears through a whole class of his school-work, and from which the Master himself does not greatly depart in the Madonna of his last *Nativity*. It would seem that this little *tondo* became a model to



Walker & Cockerell photo

[Ambrosiana, Milan]

MADONNA AND CHILD WITH ANGELS

several of his followers; for not only do we find the type, expression and attitude of the central figure constantly reproduced, but also many of the minor accessories reappear in works of his school. Such a detail as the folds of the kneeling Madonna's cloak carefully straightened out on the grass is a familiar feature in several Botticellesque *tondi*.

The large altar-piece of the *Coronation* (Accademia, Florence, No. 73), painted, Vasari tells us, to the order of the Guild of Por Sta. Maria for the Church of S. Marco, is a picture which, if it be entirely by Botticelli's hand, shows some indications of diminishing power. It is divided into two sections. The upper half represents the scene of the Madonna's Coronation by God the Father in Heaven. In the lower half, four saints, SS. John Evangelist, Augustine, Jerome, and Elizius standing in an air-filled landscape, contemplate the celestial mystery. The upper portion is the best. To the end of his artistic career Botticelli retained his power to depict light graceful figures floating rhythmically through the air—a motive that constitutes the chief beauty of his *Nativity* of 1500. It is in the lower portion that we do not recognize the power of the Master's touch. The figures of the four saints, though well characterized, are very heavily modelled, and lack the vitality that is Botticelli's distinctive characteristic. Dr. Steinmann has suggested that the artist intended in these figures to represent the four temperaments in their different modes of response to the same spiritual appeal: the fiery enthusiasm of the ardent St. John, looking upwards, wrapt in wonder; the studious concentration of the phlegmatic St. Augustine who, unmoved, con-

tinues his writing ; the nerve-strained longing of St. Jerome, worn and wasted with many fastings ; and the benignity of the sanguine St. Elizius, who quietly raises his hand in blessing. They are imposing figures, and might constitute the masterpiece of a lesser artist, but they do not show the peculiar qualities of Botticelli's best work.

The treatment of the celestial event, represented in a traditional "glory" on a background of gold, is orthodox and devotional ; and shows the return to conventionality towards which Botticelli in many of his religious pictures of the Eighties was tending. The Madonna, rapt and meek in her high exaltation, resembles both the Berlin and the Ambrosiana Madonnas. The figure of God the Father resembles both the St. Augustine of S. Barnaba and the Moses of the Sistine frescoes. As Mr. Berenson has pointed out, Botticelli made the same type, but slightly varied, serve for his St. Joseph, his Moses, his Centaur, and his conception of a humanized Deity. The light clouds flecked with a shower of roses are very delicately rendered ; but the Thrones of flame in the background are not very successful, and were probably introduced only out of respect to tradition. The great charm of the scene lies in the circle of fairy seraphs with which the artist has wreathed it. These rejoicing spirits, scattering roses as they dance through space, resume, in a freer, more careless rendering, almost all the types of his previous angels. The angels of the *Magnificat* and *Melagrana tondi*, and of the S. Barnaba altar-piece, are there with the Zephyrs from *The Birth of Venus*, and their interlaced fingers and floating draperies reproduce the favourite motives of his art.



Walker & Cockerell photo

[The Accademia, Florence]

THE CORONATION OF THE VIRGIN

Signor Supino has raised the interesting question as to how far Botticelli in these later days may have been influenced by a study of Fra Angelico's works. Although there are rather convincing indications of this influence in Botticelli's last picture, *The Nativity*, it is not, so far as I can see, apparent in *The Coronation*. The golden "glory," though used by Fra Angelico in one of his *Coronations*, was a very common motive with all the painters of the older devotional school; and the circle of seraphs, though they may bear a very distant resemblance to the angels in Fra Angelico's *Last Judgement*, are much more closely allied to the angels of Botticelli's previous works. Indeed it seems that Botticelli's angels were evolved by a process of progressive development, and beginning with the "Chigi" *Angel*, continuing through the angels of the *Magnificat*, the *Sistine Temptation*, the *Melagrana tondo*, the *S. Barnaba* altar-piece, and the *Ambrosiana Madonna*, led up naturally, without the assumption of any extraneous influence, to a climax in the seraphic choirs of *The Coronation* and *The Nativity*.

With regard to the date of *The Coronation*, authorities are much at variance. Some critics have placed it as early as 1480, while Signor Supino, on the grounds of its rather exaggerated attitudes and vehemence of expression (in the lower part) assigns it to *c.* 1496-97. Between these extremes I am inclined to take a middle course, and ascribe it to *c.* 1488-90. The reasons for this have been already indicated. It does not show any of the finish, nor all the power, of Botticelli's early or mature work. There is little new in it; the motives and types *resume* what he had already done. At the same time, I cannot see that it shows the evidences of decline

that Signor Supino detects. Botticelli's activity in the late Nineties seems to have been very limited. *The Nativity* was a last outburst of his genius, but it does not bear, technically, any close resemblance to *The Coronation*; one is a comparatively small picture, the other, a large altar-piece; and the choir of angels, the one motive that both have in common, is not sufficient to ally them as works of the same period.

The predella of *The Coronation* containing five small panels representing scenes from the lives of SS. Augustine, John the Evangelist, Jerome and Elizius, with an *Annunciation* in the centre, is preserved in the same Gallery (No. 74).

The *Annunciation* (Uffizi, No. 1316) is a disputed picture. Morelli rejected it, and it does not appear in Mr. Berenson's list of our artist's authentic works. The attitude of the Virgin, who in type resembles the Madonna of *The Coronation*, hardly points to Botticelli's work. The treatment of the accessories is mean and unconvincing and imitative in character. But the figure of the Angel Gabriel, just alighted from his flight through space, with his wings still quivering and his elaborate draperies floating behind him, seems to reveal the Master's hand. Who but Botticelli could have conveyed this vivid sense of rushing movement remaining even after its abrupt arrest? As an *ensemble* the picture is certainly not entitled to rank among his masterpieces; and though it shows his influence and his active co-operation in one figure, it shows also the intervention of a not very gifted assistant. It was painted, as Vasari tells us, for the monks of Cestello, and hung in their church (now Sta. Maria Maddalena dei Pazzi) over the altar in the chapel



Walker & Cockerell photo

[Uffizi Gallery, Florence]

THE ANNUNCIATION

dedicated to the Annunciation. It probably issued from Botticelli's workshop about the year 1490, as the chapel in question, given by Benedetto di S. Giovanni Guardi, was commenced in 1488, and was consecrated by Bishop Pagagnotti on June 26th 1490.

CHAPTER VII

LAST WORKS

THE small picture of *Calumny* (Uffizi, No. 1182), shows clear indications of being a late work of our Master, and there can be little doubt, I think, that it belongs to the last decade of his artistic activity, probably to c. 1490-1492. The subject was taken from the lost masterpiece of the old Greek painter Apelles, as described by Lucian in the "Opusculi." Lucian's description had been translated and popularized by Alberti in his "Libro di Pittura," a book which was evidently a favourite one with Botticelli, and which had already furnished him with suggestions for some of the most delightful motives of his decorative pictures. It was probably the source from which he derived the materials for his *Calumny*, although it is quite possible that he was also acquainted, either directly or through the medium of his scholarly friends, with Lucian's account of Apelles' work.

Alberti's version, which is a free translation of the Greek original, is thus quaintly phrased: "There was once a man who had very long ears, close to whom stood two women, Ignorance and Suspicion. Before him appears another woman, Calumny, who was very beautiful, but whose face was exceptionally wary and

intriguing. In one hand she holds a flaming torch, with the other she drags forward by the hair a youth who raises his hands in supplication. She is guided by a man, pallid, repulsive in countenance, and of a cruel aspect, who might be likened to one who had been battered in many fierce contests; and the name of this man is Rancour or Envy. Calumny is accompanied by two serving-maids who deck her with ornaments, and these are Hypocrisy and Deceit. At a little distance stands Remorse, clad in a dark, sordid raiment, and who is convulsed with despair. Close to this last appears Truth, modest and bashful. If this story is impressive when narrated, how much power and grace it must have possessed when painted by such an excellent artist!"

Botticelli has followed this narrative so closely that it might stand as a description of his picture. He lays his scene in a spacious Renaissance audience-hall, richly decorated with statues and sculptured friezes, and having large open arches in the background that disclose a distant vista of tranquil sea and sky. To the right, on a raised platform, is enthroned the incompetent judge, whose "long ears" are open to the whispered suggestions of his female advisers, Ignorance and Suspicion. Before him, occupying the centre of the picture, appears Calumny, meek and triumphant, dragging forward her helpless victim. She is preceded by her sinister guide Envy, and attended by her wanton maids, Hypocrisy and Deceit. To the left stand two isolated figures: Remorse, an aged, witch-like woman, withered and decrepit, shrouded in a large black mantle over a white under-dress that resembles somewhat a religious habit; and Truth, a beautiful nude figure, strongly recalling

Venus, who, with hand and eyes uplifted to heaven, seems to invoke the eternal principle of natural justice.

The scene is vividly and dramatically realized ; but it is rendered with a vehemence both of sentiment and expression which somewhat detracts from the artistic effect. The action and gestures are exaggerated, the grouping entangled, and the sense of movement so inimitably conveyed in Botticelli's earlier works degenerates here into violent excitement in some figures and pedantic affectation in others. The two figures in repose, Truth and Remorse, are admirable, although in the harshly emphasized characteristics of the latter we miss the delicate subtlety of his earlier delineations. The picture displays a bitter irony of feeling that is quite unprecedented in his art. It seems to have been painted in some mood of exasperation, as a passionate protest against intrigue and falsehood, a passionate appeal for right and justice. For the first time he subordinates, even sacrifices, aesthetic effect to an ethical purpose, and uses his art as a means for expounding moral truths.

To what can we attribute this change, for which a dramatic sense of the sufferings of Apelles is hardly sufficient to account? It is possible that the picture may have been inspired by some contemporary incident which had roused the artist's ire—some burning wrong or flagrant injustice to which his outburst of righteous indignation may have had a special reference. But there is another explanation of this change which seems to me more probable—though I advance it only as a suggestion.

During the Lent of 1491 the voice of Savonarola thundered through the Florentine Duomo, in fierce denunciation of the abuse of power, the corruption of



Walker & Cockerell photo

CALUMNY

[Uffizi Gallery, Florence]

office, the vanity and the uncharitableness, of contemporary Florentine life. It seems to me not unlikely that the Frate's influence, which later on was to subjugate our impressionable artist, may have already begun when he painted his *Calumny*; and that the earnest moral purpose which he now for the first time manifests may have been but the inauguration of the changed attitude towards life which characterizes the last decade of his art. The picture cannot of course belong to the period when Botticelli was an avowed "Piagnone," as in that case the nude figures would have been excluded. But it may date from a time when the painter, in common with a large majority of the Florentine population, had been stirred by Savonarola's fiery exhortations to a long-lapsed sense of elementary right and wrong.

Despite its artistic faults the *Calumny* shows unimpaired technical resources. The difficult perspective of the lordly hall is managed with unfailing dexterity; and the rich ornamentation is executed with all the minutiae, though hardly the delicacy, of his early work. In some respects Botticelli, towards the end of his career, reverts to the methods of his youth. Nearly all the pictures of his prime are large, with figures that are life-size, or over life-size. We now find him returning to the small panels of his early days, containing a number of small, often crowded figures, and generally brightly coloured. The colouring of *Calumny* is very brilliant, though not particularly harmonious; and the use of gold is lavish in the hair, the high lights, and in the bas-reliefs of the architecture. These latter represent various scenes of pagan mythology alternating with Biblical episodes: *Pallas with the head of the Medusa*, *Judith with the*

head of Holofernes, Apollo and Daphne, Jupiter and Antiope, St. George with the Dragon, The Death of Lucretia, The Justice of Trajan, and various *amorini*, *putti* and centaurs. It has been suggested that these subjects were introduced as having some allegorical bearing on the theme of the picture. But it is rather difficult to establish such a connection; and it seems more probable, from their heterogeneous character, that they were chosen merely as favourite motives of decoration. The statues in the niches represent various apostles, prophets and saints, foremost among whom appears St. George, a figure recalling Donatello's *St. George*, but, as Signor Supino says, more closely modelled on Andrea Castagno's *Pippo Spano* in the Pandolfini villa at Legnaja.

The picture, which is extraordinarily well preserved, seems to have been given by Botticelli to his friend Antonio Segni; and when Vasari wrote, it was still in the possession of the Segni family at Florence, one of whom, Messer Fabio by name, had inscribed on it in Latin the following lines, which have since been either effaced or removed: *This picture contains a warning to the Kings of the earth lest they should be tempted to mis-judge anv. Apelles gave such a picture to the King of the Egyptians. The King was worthy of the gift, as was the gift of the King.*

Belonging to the same period and showing many of the same characteristics as the *Calumny* are a series of panels illustrating scenes from the *Life of St. Zenobius*. In the May of 1491 we know that Botticelli had been commissioned to decorate the Chapel of St. Zenobius in the Duomo with mosaics, a work which was never



SCENE IN THE LIFE OF ST. ZANOBI

[*Dr. Ludwig Mond's Gallery, London*]

carried out. It is possible that some of the studies prepared for it were utilized by the artist for these panels, although the scenes portrayed are far too overcrowded to be exact reproductions of designs intended for execution in mosaic. Each panel represents several episodes in the life of the saint, which are skilfully separated from one another by the arrangement of the architecture. But too many figures are introduced into each scene, and they show Botticelli's incorrigible fault of confused grouping. The episodes—which include the saint's vocation, baptism, and consecration as bishop, his principal miracles and his death—are rendered with great dramatic power; but they reproduce in an enhanced degree all the defects of the *Calumny*. There is the same vehemence, here almost wildness, of gesture and attitude; the same unruly haste and exaggeration of action; the same preponderance of architectural accessories. From their shape it is evident that these panels were destined for the decoration of a chest—probably one of the *cassoni di corredo*, or bridal chests, so much in vogue at the time. They are now dispersed through various collections: two of them are in Mr. Ludwig Mond's collection in London; two others (replicas of these) are in the possession of the Rondinelli family at Florence; and one—the best—is in the public gallery at Dresden.

Similar in style to the *St. Zenobius* series are two panels illustrating respectively *The Death of Lucretia* and *The Story of Virginia*. The former of these is now in Mrs. Gardner's collection at Boston. The latter, which was acquired by Morelli, formed part of his bequest to the public gallery of Bergamo. It was

identified by him as one of the pictures which, according to Vasari, Botticelli painted for Giovanni Vespucci, "*Con molte figure vivissime e belli.*" It contains, Morelli says, "some fifty figures all equally spirited in conception and careful in execution, and each one indispensable to the harmony of the whole."

The small panel of *St. Augustine in his Study* (Uffizi, No. 1179), which Morelli was the first to recognize as Botticelli's work, was assigned by him to the same period as the *St. Zenobius* panels. It is certainly separated by many years from the fresco of the same subject in the Church of Ognissanti. The Saint—earnest, absorbed, and rather heavy in countenance—recalls some of the types in the "*S. Barnaba*" *Madonna* and *The Coronation*; the architectural setting is entirely in the manner of Botticelli's later work; and the gold-lightened bas-reliefs are closely allied in character to the sculptured friezes in the *Calumny*. The colouring is particularly fine and harmonious.

To about the same, possibly a somewhat earlier, date must, I think, be assigned the little *Madonna and Child with St. John* in the possession of Mr. J. P. Heseltine. There is reason to doubt whether this beautiful and rather puzzling little picture was executed entirely by Botticelli; but his share in it seems sufficiently important to warrant its inclusion among his authentic works. The figure of the Madonna, strongly resembling the Ambrosiana Madonna, is assuredly from his brush. The Holy Child, a very sweet little figure not quite faultlessly drawn, is less convincing. His attitude on His mother's knee harks back somewhat to that of the Holy Child in the Poldi-Pezzoli picture; but the fragile body, with its



Walker & Cockerell photo

[Uffizi Gallery, Florence]

ST. AUGUSTINE

ill-drawn forearms, does not show the plump, rounded, *living* contours which distinguish Botticelli's Infants, nor do the features bear much resemblance to Botticelli's characteristic types. The little kneeling Baptist, despite his rather strained attitude, forms a most delightful motive ; but it is a motive which does not appear in any of Botticelli's other pictures. The chubby, uplifted face with its look of fixed adoration is full of life, and if not painted by Botticelli, was certainly the work of an artist of exceptional merit. The type, however, bears more resemblance to the little St. John in the National Gallery *Madonna* (No. 1412, attributed by Mr. Berenson to the *Amico di Sandro*), and also to some of Filippino's conceptions, than to anything we can definitely associate with Botticelli. Yet, although on examination, these various details do not correspond with Botticelli's usual types and treatment, they are blent into an *ensemble* which is pronouncedly Botticellian in character, and which is not only immeasurably superior to any of the school-work I have seen, but is so perfectly harmonious in itself as to seem the work of only one artist ! The landscape with its Leonardesque rocks, is in the style of Botticelli's latest period ; and the florid relief on the stone parapet recalls the sculptures in the *St. Augustine* and the *Calumny*.

To the period when Botticelli was dominated by the influence of Savonarola, must be ascribed *The Adoration of the Magi* which, in an almost ruined condition, was recently unearthed from the store-room of the Uffizi, and now hangs in one of the corridors of that Gallery (No. 3436). The subject had always been a favourite one with him. In all he painted it five times, and now

in the evening of his artistic life he returns to it again. He returns to it with all the impatience, the incapacity for sustained effort which characterizes his late work. Although there is no doubt that the picture was designed and "laid in" by Botticelli, he seems to have proceeded no further with it than the chiaroscuro undersketch, executed in bistre. The colouring (such as it is) was evidently added later by some inexpert painter of the sixteenth century, and it even seems to have been again tampered with in parts at a subsequent date. In conception this *Adoration* contrasts strongly with his earlier versions of the same subject, and shows all the tumultuous feeling, the exaggerated gestures, and the religious exaltation, which belong to his latest period. The regal figures of the Magi, with their lordly retinues, are replaced by a motley (and very Florentine) crowd of worshippers, kneeling in adoration before the Infant form of Him whom Savonarola had proclaimed the King of Florence. A special interest attaches to the picture by the introduction of two figures, generally supposed to represent Lorenzo and Savonarola. On the left stands a Dominican friar, whose features bear some resemblance to those of the great preacher from St. Mark's. With commanding, almost menacing, mien he points to the Holy Family; and the figure beside him, who certainly resembles Lorenzo the Magnificent, obedient to his gesture, strains forward in an attitude of supplication towards the Divine Child. A stately figure in the crowd on the right, with long hair and flowing beard, and enveloped in a large mantle, is with much probability supposed to be a portrait of Botticelli's friend, Leonardo da Vinci.



Walker & Cockerell photo

[Mr. J. P. Heseltine's Collection]

THE MADONNA WITH INFANT CHRIST AND ST. JOHN

The *Pietà* in the Munich Gallery (No. 1010) is generally considered to have been painted by Botticelli, under the influence of some of Savonarola's Holy Week Sermons on the Passion. This picture shows all the intensity of emotional expression that distinguishes some phases of his art, together with the fervour of religious devotion which marks his latest works. It is more restrained, more chastened in sentiment than his pictures of the early nineties; the composition in its general outlines is fine, and the sense of oppression in the dark cavernous tomb is powerfully rendered. Yet it is difficult to believe that it is entirely his work. It is accepted as such by the majority of his biographers, who identify it with the *Pietà* which he is said by Vasari to have painted for the Church of Sta. Maria Maggiore. Morelli also believed it to be a genuine work; but it is not included in Mr. Berenson's list of Botticelli's authentic paintings. That it issued from his *bottega*, that it was in part designed, in part also executed, by the Master is highly probable. The general scheme of the composition, the central group of the Mater Dolorosa and St. John, and possibly too the Mary kneeling at Christ's head, may be Botticelli's work. But the figures of SS. Jerome and Paul, whose attitudes form two parallel lines, the heavily modelled St. Peter, the clumsy draperies of the Magdalene and the third Mary, can only be attributable to an assistant. The heavy aureoles resting on the saints' heads like metal plates, attract the eye to a series of hard lines which are quite unlike Botticelli's delicate treatment of such accessories. The figure of the Christ is well modelled in parts and admirably suggests the dead weight of a life-

less body; but it is not quite correctly drawn, and the lower limbs are rather out of proportion to the rest of the figure. The beardless, so-called "Apollo" type is very unusual in the fifteenth century, and contrasts strongly with Botticelli's conception on the only other important occasion when he represented the Saviour, namely, in the fresco of the *Temptation of Christ*. The picture is curiously sculptural in character, and the design seems more adapted for a bas-relief than for a painting.

In 1498 Savonarola died on the gibbet in the Piazza della Signoria. Two years afterwards Botticelli, with some return of his old inimitable power, painted the little *Nativity* now in the National Gallery (No. 1034), the only picture he appears ever to have signed. This work has been, and still is, the subject of considerable study among those who seek to elucidate its "full significance." In general feeling it is not only the most devotional of all Botticelli's works, but it is one of the most fervently religious pictures which has ever been painted by any artist. Somewhat rough in technique and far from faultless in drawing, it seems to have been executed under "the strain of intense spiritual excitement," under the inspiration of a prolonged ecstasy, as the result of some mystical vision. "Was there ever," asks Professor Colvin, "any picture painted which was inspired by such intense faith as this? It glows with the very white heat of it!"

The panel contains three distinct motives which are not, however, harshly divided. The scene is laid in an idealized landscape, half garden, half woodland. The two lower motives are separated only by the garden paths, while the third is placed in the expanse of open



Hausfotingl photo

THE PIETA

[Munich]

sky above. In the centre of the picture is a cave-like stable with a rough shed projecting from it, beneath which appear the Holy Family with an ox and an ass at the back. The Madonna, who in type and attitude somewhat resembles the Madonna of the Ambrosiana *tondo*, is rapt in contemplation of the Holy Child. To the right two shepherds kneeling in adoration are caressed by an angel. On the left another angel points out the Divine Infant to a group of men who may possibly represent the three Magi. All are crowned with olives; and the angels hold large olive branches.¹ Three more angels, also with olive branches, kneel on the roof of the shed and chant the "Gloria in Excelsis." In the lowest part of the picture, and advancing along the greensward to the path that leads up to the shed, are three pilgrims, each in the embrace of an angel, who seems to be guiding him onward. In the corners mediaevally conceived devils gnashing their teeth represent the vanquished powers of Evil. In the upper part a choir of rejoicing seraphs, holding olive branches in their joined hands, dance in the clear sky overhead. Above is traced in Greek the enigmatical superscription which has exercised the ingenuity of all Botticelli's critics: "*This picture was painted by me, Alessandro, at the end of 1500, during the troubles of Italy at the half-time after the time which was prophesied in the 11th Chapter of St. John the Evangelist and the Second Woe of the Apocalypse, and when Satan shall be loosed on the earth for three years and a half. After which the Devil shall be enchained and we shall see him trodden under*"

Count Plunkett describes these crowns and boughs as myrtle.

foot as in this picture." The mystical confusion of thought into which Botticelli had fallen as a result, probably, of his broodings on the life and death of Savonarola and his absorption in Dante's weird visions, is sufficiently apparent in these words.

Many solutions of the puzzle have been advanced. It is generally supposed that the picture refers to some spiritual triumph of Savonarola; and the three figures in the foreground are said to represent him and his two companions in martyrdom. But none of the faces bear any resemblance to the well-known features of Savonarola; and it is not even certain that these three pilgrims, with their long olive-crowned locks, are intended to represent friars. Although the lengthy robes of the first two may be interpreted as religious habits, the third seems to be clad in an ordinary Florentine tunic. It is far more probable that these pairs of figures emblemize, in a quite general way, the first meeting of the souls of the redeemed with their guardian angels in Paradise. If this be so, the motive was in all likelihood suggested to Botticelli by Fra Angelico's *Last Judgement*. Signor Supino's assumption that in his latter days he was influenced by Fra Angelico's art becomes highly probable when restricted to his last picture.

The "troubles of Italy" alluded to in the phrase of the superscription have been variously interpreted as the political disorders that convulsed Florence after the expulsion of the Medici, the constant increase of French encroachment, the war with the Turks, etc.—all disasters which to the minds of Savonarola's disciples might seem the outcome of a divine judgement on his unjust condemnation. The promise of deliverance "when the



Walker & Cockerell photo)

[National Gallery

THE NATIVITY

Devil shall be enchained," may be a reference to the great Jubilee of 1500, from which, as Count Plunkett says, "the pious hoped great spiritual results." Or, more subtly interpreted, it may refer to the belief in some future resuscitation of Savonarola's teaching, some re-incarnation of his spirit—almost a resurrection of the man; especially if, as seems probable, the superscription alludes not only to the eleventh chapter of the Apocalypse, but also to the eleventh chapter of St. John's Gospel, which contains the account of the raising of Lazarus, and the prophecy concerning the "one man who should die for the nation."

Amidst all these speculations it must be borne in mind that whatever may be the abstruse allusions, political or otherwise, contained in the superscription—they are in the superscription only, and not in the picture. The picture itself is but the embodiment of an ecstatic meditation on the Mystery of the Nativity. And its real subject is the triumph over Evil, which was achieved by the Act of the Incarnation. What more natural than that Botticelli as a sequel to this theme should introduce the souls of the just in the moment of their liberation, when beholding their guardian angels for the first time face to face, they meet them in a close embrace that typifies the ultimate reconciliation of the human and the angelic natures? Treating of such a subject, and burning with his ardent faith in the final victory of good over evil, Botticelli may well have applied it to particular circumstances in contemporary life. But he was too consummate an artist to attempt to do this in the terms of painting. So he adds his strange superscription—not as a commentary on, nor as

an explanation of, his picture, which is complete in itself, but as indicating the application of a universal truth to particular events in actual life.

Considered artistically the picture contains some details of great beauty. The circle of seraphs, with their waving olive branches and little suspended crowns, is worthy, in its light ethereal grace, to be compared with the work of Botticelli's best years. The colours of their flowing robes, alternately white, red, and bronze-green—the colours in which Dante has vested his vision of Beatrice—are combined into a very lovely harmony. But the execution, especially in the faces, is rough and careless, and the proportions throughout are faulty. The picture as a whole lacks pictorial unity. It is a beautiful illustration, more than a picture. One sees in it clearly the influence of the years the artist had devoted to the work of an illustrator.

With the completion of *The Nativity* Botticelli's life as a painter closed. He probably continued for a time his illustrations of the "Divina Commedia"; but as far as can be ascertained he painted no more.

CHAPTER VIII

HIS DRAWINGS

BOTTICELLI'S drawings, or drawings attributed to him, are scattered through the museums of Europe. One of the most important collections is that in the Uffizi, which consists chiefly of sketches and preparatory studies for his pictures. Amongst the specimens preserved there are a pen-drawing of the *Madonna and St. Joseph in adoration of the Holy Child* (which was probably a study for *The Nativity*), a sketch of *The Adoration of the Magi*, another of the head of Venus in *Spring*, and one which may have been a study for "Flora" in the same picture. There is also a silver-point drawing of the Angel Gabriel, and a pen-drawing of *Venus and Love*, and a sketch of Angels floating in the air. In the Academy is another study of an Angel. In the Albertina at Vienna is a hasty sketch which may have been a preliminary to the picture of the *Return of Judith*. In the Louvre are two pen-drawings representing respectively the *Resuscitation of Two Boys by a Saint* and the *Martyrdom of St. Lucy*, both of which are ascribed to Botticelli. In the Malcolm Collection in the British Museum is a drawing of a *Woman with a Putto*, which is generally known as an allegorical figure of *Abundance*. It is from this figure that the *Allegory of*

Fruitfulness, now at Chantilly, is supposed to have been derived by some imitator of Botticelli.¹

The chief interest in Botticelli's drawings is, however, centred in his illustrations of the "Divina Commedia," over which, in Vasari's opinion, he "wasted so much time." His Anonymous biographer, confirming Vasari's account, tells us that he "illustrated a Dante on parchment for Lorenzo di Pier Francesco dei Medici, a work which was wonderfully carried out." This precious manuscript, discovered in the last century by Waagen in the Duke of Hamilton's Collection, has since been bought by the Prussian Government, and is now preserved in the Berlin Museum. It consists of eighty-eight pages of fine parchment, on which are eighty-five drawings. On the front side of each page, disposed in four columns, the text of the poem is written, very carefully and minutely, in Gothic characters—one canto to each page. On the reverse side are the drawings, so arranged that each drawing faces the canto it illustrates. Fifteen canti are missing from the Berlin manuscript. In 1886 seven of these—illustrating Canti I., IX., X., XII., XIII., XV. and XVI. of the "Inferno," together with a small *tondo* of Hell—were discovered by Strzygowski in the Vatican Library, in a miscellany volume which Pope Alexander VII. had acquired from Queen Christina of Sweden.

The drawings are executed in soft silver-point, probably an alloy of silver and lead, and the majority of them have been traced over afterwards in pen and ink. One in the Berlin Collection (illustrating Canto XVIII.

¹ This enumeration has been taken from Count Plunkett's book on Botticelli.



[British Museum

ABUNDANCE

of the "Inferno") and three in the Vatican set have been roughly coloured, but hardly by Botticelli.

Botticelli's Dante illustrations have been severely criticised. They vary considerably in merit. On the whole they are a subject of disappointment to his admirers. They are executed entirely in fine, often extremely minute, lines, with no attempt at shading or *chiaroscuro*, and with only slightly suggested modelling. As a result the general effect is often confused, sometimes almost indecipherable. Add to this, the artist has crowded the various incidents related in each canto into one illustration, without any regard for their relative importance. In the majority of the "Inferno," and many of the "Purgatorio" series, the figures of Dante and Virgil are repeated three or four times in the same drawing—sometimes as illustrating their progress from one scene to another, sometimes as illustrating different moments in one and the self-same action. In pursuing this method Botticelli was, after all, only following the traditions of mediaeval illustration; but his own lack of synthetic instinct also counts for something in the impression of intricacy he often conveys. It cannot be denied, too, that in some instances his imagery is exceedingly puerile and unworthy of the sublimity of his theme. Such a conception, for example, as the figures of Dante and Beatrice standing at the foot of a ladder, hardly conveys the suggestion of a flight to the celestial regions. At times it seems as if these illustrations were the work of a man whose creative power was exhausted, whose imagination, overtaxed and overstrained, failed to respond to his demands on it, and was perhaps paralyzed before the stern, overpowering grandeur of his subject.

At other times when, as in the later *canti* of the "Purgatorio," and many parts of the "Paradiso," the scenes represented enable him to reproduce some of the favourite motives of his art—adoring angels, circles of seraphs, etc.—his power of poetic fantasy revives in all its force and charm. He abandons here the method of multiplying episodes in one drawing, and throughout the "Paradiso" the figures of Dante and Beatrice appear only once, and generally well centralized, in each illustration. Amongst the most beautiful illustrations is that of Canto XXX. of the "Purgatorio," where the chariot drawn by a griffin (symbol of the Church led by Christ) is represented in triumphal procession, preceded by seven light-bearing angels and the long ranks of the twenty-four Ancients, while behind, amidst a cloud of angels scattering flowers, appears the vision of Beatrice. In the drawing attached to Canto XXVIII. of the "Paradiso," Dante and Beatrice appear soaring upwards amidst choirs of angels, whose soft wings and fluttering draperies, and little flags and staves, are rendered with characteristic delicacy and grace. An angel to the left bears a tablet, on which in microscopic characters are traced some letters—letters that appear so rarely in the art of this most individualistic of artists—the letters that spell his name: Sandro di Mariano.

With regard to the date of the Dantesque illustrations, although critics are generally agreed that the manuscript for Lorenzo di Pier Francesco dei Medici was mainly executed in Botticelli's later days, there is every probability that in a much earlier period of his life he had caught the Dantesque enthusiasm with which Landini had inspired the Florentines. In Landini's edition of the



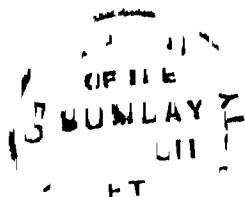
ILLUSTRATION TO DANTE, "PARADISO," XXI.

"Divina Commedia," published in 1481, nineteen *canti* of the "Inferno" are illustrated with copperplates, which bear a very strong resemblance to the drawings in Botticelli's manuscript. The designs are not in any instance identical; the version in the copperplates is throughout more simplified, but the similarities are too striking to admit of doubt that both series were the work of the same artist. From this it appears, either that Botticelli was at work on the Medici MS. as early as 1481, and that his designs were known to Landini's engraver, who simplified them in the process of reproduction; or that, before receiving his commission from Lorenzo di Piero, Botticelli had undertaken to illustrate Landini's edition of the "Divina Commedia," and was unable, owing to his journey to Rome, to proceed further than the nineteenth canto. The latter is the more probable alternative. Destined for engraving on copper, the designs would naturally have been reduced to their simplest expression. And in all likelihood it was owing to this work that, on his return from Rome, he received the commission from Lorenzo di Piero which occupied the later years of his life. In executing this commission he reproduced the designs of his earlier attempt, and in reproducing amplified and elaborated them.

It is an open question whether Botticelli himself practised the art of engraving. Vasari, when mentioning that he illustrated the "Inferno," says that he engraved it (*lo mise in stampa*), and adds that he also engraved "*molte cose*" from designs he had made, though without much success (*in cattiva maniera, perche l'intaglio era mal fatto*). On the strength chiefly, as it seems, of Vasari's testimony, some writers have included Botticelli's

name among those of the Florentine engravers of the fifteenth century; and various engravings preserved in the British Museum and elsewhere, which show affinities to his style, have been tentatively ascribed not only to his designs but to his actual workmanship. No single engraving has, however, as yet been authenticated as the work of his burin. The only one which Vasari mentions by name—the Trionfo della Fede of Savonarola—tends rather to discredit the whole of his statement regarding Botticelli's activity as an engraver; for this work of Savonarola was not published till 1516, and the only figured engraving it contains—the frontispiece—bears no resemblance to Botticelli's style. The "Inferno" illustrations alluded to by Vasari can hardly be other than those in Landini's edition of Dante, published by Niccolo Lorenzo della Magna in 1481; but although a few writers have assumed that these engravings were executed by Botticelli, the majority of critics are agreed that they were the work of Baccio Baldini, a Florentine engraver of the period, who followed Botticelli's designs. In his life of Marcantonio Bolognese, Vasari, surveying the work of the early engravers, mentions that all Baccio Baldini's designs were furnished by Botticelli. It is highly probable that this association represents the chief part, if not the whole, of Botticelli's connection with engraving, which was that of a designer rather than an executant. In this case, Vasari's phrase, "*mise in stampa*," may have been loosely used for "*fece mettere in stampa*"—*caused* to be engraved. If, however, we accept Vasari's statement literally, we must also accept it entirely, and admitting that Botticelli made some attempts in this popular art, we may conclude that

owing to his slow progress in it (his *cattiva maniera*), he speedily abandoned it for more congenial work. It is possible that as a designer he may have exercised considerable influence upon the budding art of engraving, and that in order to provide suitable designs, he may even have studied its rudiments. His own unsuccessful efforts to practise it (even if he ever made any) are hardly worth the attention that has been bestowed upon them.



CHAPTER IX

HIS SCHOOL-WORK

VOLUMES might be written on Botticelli's school-work. It is impossible here to do more than touch on one or two points in a wide and intricate subject.

To a genius unique, in some respects supreme, Botticelli added a remarkable power of personal influence. He was a born leader; and, while his genius was individual and incommunicable, his strong personality seems, in varying degrees, to have communicated itself to a host of zealous, but often blind and indiscriminating, followers. Add to this, he was the initiator of a new and highly distinctive style—a *manner* strongly defined, of which the external characteristics lent themselves to facile imitation, but which, when bereft of the Master's vivifying touch, easily degenerated into a *mannerism*. During the greater part of his career Botticelli was at the head of a very large and important *bottega*. His numerous students must have comprised men of very varying artistic aptitudes—some possessed of genuine power and individuality, others mere unintelligent copyists, but all, as we may believe, dominated by the commanding personality of the Master, and all, alas! aspiring to be “continuators” of his style. His style

was so pronounced that even the most unworthy stragglers among his followers could be identified as belonging to his camp.

Further, the area of his influence was not limited by the walls of his workshop. Many contemporary painters endowed with true, though minor artistic inventiveness, received a definite impulse from his example; and, while following his lead, they made new paths for themselves without greatly diverging from the direction in which he had preceded them.

Given these composite conditions, we are able to make a rough classification of what is generically known as Botticelli's school-work.

In the first place we have the work of artists, whether *scolari* of Botticelli's or not, who were themselves gifted with originality and artistic sense, but who acquired a certain quality and took a definite direction under the guidance of the Master's art. In various contemporary pictures we find reproduced motives—the plaintive Madonnas, the wistful child-angels, the ornamental treatment of hair, flowers, and draperies, which are clearly derived from Botticelli; but which are reproduced *with a difference*, and show a genuine individuality of touch which raises them to the rank of separate, though not independent, inventions.¹ A good example of this kind

¹ An instance of this is seen in the figure of the little St. John with his hair-shirt and staff, which appears so frequently in the school-work, but which does not occur in any of Botticelli's authenticated pictures, unless, indeed, we accept as his work the St. John in Mr. Heseltine's panel. But although this motive in all probability did not originate with him, it was to a great extent *derived* from his child-angels, and inventively developed by some artist influenced by him.

of work is the *Madonna and Child with St. John* in the Louvre (No. 1296). This picture, which at one time was attributed to Botticelli, contains both more and very much less than any of his works. It would never have been painted but for him; and yet, in some ways, it is distinct from his achievement. To this class belongs also, I think, the art of Sandro's *Amico*, revealed by Mr. Berenson.

Secondly, we come to the class of artists who have deliberately caught hold of particular moods or phases of sentiment in Botticelli's work, and detaching them from their place in the harmony of the Master's *ensembles*, have given them an isolated and accentuated expression. To this category belong the exaggerated languor of the *Madonna and Child with St. John* in the Pitti (No. 357), and the feeble affectation of the *tondo* of the *Madonna and Child with Angels* in the Borghese Gallery at Rome, as well as many other pictures which in their sentiment partake almost of the nature of caricatures.

Thirdly, there is the work of those painters who were merely repeating-machines (and not exact at that) of a strongly-defined "pattern." These are they who have so indefinitely and so unworthily swelled the mass of "Botticellian art." Too ambitious and too incompetent to be faithful copyists, their pictures are neither a revelation of their own individuality, nor a clear reflection of the Master's work. In this class I should place, amongst many other works of unskilful imitation, the Raczyński *tondo* of the *Madonna and Child with Eight Angels*, now in the Berlin Gallery.

Leaving the works which were either directly or in-



Walker & Cockerell photo]

[The Louvre

MADONNA AND CHILD WITH ST. JOHN

SCHOOL WORK

directly inspired by the Master's influence or example, we come to those which show traces of his actual intervention. Here again we have to distinguish.

In the first place there are certain pictures of the school which, it seems to me, may have originated in some of Botticelli's experimental studies and designs, which, discarded by him, became the basis of works developed by more or less expert pupils. An instance of this class is, I think, to be found in the *tondo* of the (full-length) *Madonna with Seven Light-bearing Angels*, now in the Berlin Museum. This picture contains traces of Botticelli's touch, especially in the composition and the conception of the angels; but these traces seem to be weakened, in parts obliterated, in the process of development. One feels that another hand has been superposed on Botticelli's hand. I am unable to fix a date to this *tondo*, but from certain distant analogies to the angels in *The Temptation of Christ*, I am inclined to think that the original sketch may have represented one of Botticelli's first essays in winged angels, and that it may have been executed some time between 1475 and 1480, and that the picture was probably completed later by some artist who had seen the *Madonna of S. Barnaba*.

Lastly, we come to the most important of all Botticelli's school-work—those pictures which betray either his personal supervision or his active co-operation. Amongst these may be mentioned the panels of *The Story of Nastagio degli Onesti* (now at Lyons), the *tondo* of the *Madonna and Child with Angels* (known as the *Madonna of the Roses*) in the private apartments of the Pitti Palace, the *Madonna and Child with St. John and Angels* in the

National Gallery (No. 226), and the *tondo* of the *Madonna and Child with St. John*, recently discovered at Piacenza. Excepting the first-named, all these pictures belong, I think, to the period of the Nineties, because firstly, they show the devotional feeling which characterizes Botticelli's latest development; secondly, in the type of the Madonna, and in various accessories, they are more or less closely derived from the Ambrosiana *Madonna*.

The Madonna of the Roses is a beautiful little picture, but it is difficult to define Botticelli's share in it. The ill-drawn Child can hardly be his work, and the angels, though entirely in his style, lack his vitality. The attitude of the Madonna is very similar to that in *The Nativity*; and in type and treatment she is a link between the Ambrosiana *tondo* and Botticelli's last picture.

The National Gallery *tondo* shows an analogous type in the Madonna and the same background of wild roses; and there can be little doubt that the picture was painted in Botticelli's workshop by some faithful and intelligent disciple, who probably was aided in his work by the Master's counsels, if not also by his actual co-operation.

The new discovery at Piacenza is at present obscured by a thick coating of dirt, and it is difficult to form an opinion concerning it. I am, however, inclined to think that Botticelli's share in it may have been greater than in much of his "school-work." The picture is a *tondo* measuring about ninety-five centimetres in diameter. It is painted on canvas applied to a wood panel. The Madonna is represented kneeling in an open meadow in adoration of the Divine Child, who lies on the grass before her. On the other side kneels the little St. John with a red cloak partially concealing his



Brogi photo

[Pitti Palace, Florence]

THE MADONNA DELLE ROSE

hair-shirt, and his small arms outstretched to the Holy Child. In the background are thick bushes of wild roses with straight delicate stems; and a shower of plucked roses is scattered on the grass round the Divine Infant. The type and attitude of the Madonna and Child (though the latter is better drawn) very strongly resemble the figures in *The Madonna of the Roses*, and there can be no doubt that the two pictures are closely related. The little St. John recalls the St. John in Mr. Heseltine's *Madonna*. The Madonna wears a white veil and a long olive-green mantle over a red under-dress, and the folds of her draperies are straightened out on the grass, as in *The Madonna of the Roses* and the *Ambrosiana tondo*. The hair is not very delicately painted, and the execution in general is not highly-finished; but the "quality of line" throughout is pure and sure. Beneath is the inscription: "*Quia respexit humilitate ancillae sue.*" The origin of the picture is shrouded in mystery. It was for many years in the Castello dei Bardi, a large property in the neighbourhood of Piacenza, formerly in the possession of the Landi family. Some nine years ago, in 1893, the Castello, with all it contained, was acquired by the Municipio of Piacenza, and the picture was transferred to the Public Library of that city, where it now hangs.

Turning now from the work to the workers of Botticelli's School, we find that a few names have been preserved. Signor Supino, following Crowe and Cavalcaselle, has compiled the following list from the Register of the Guild of Painters: Jacopo di Domenico Papi (1463-1530), Giovanni di Benedetto Cianfanini (1462-1542), Rafaello di Lorenzo Tosi (born 1469), called "Il

Toso," Biagio di Antonio Tucci (1466-1515), Jacopo di Francesco Filippi (died in 1527). To these must be added Botticelli's best-known pupil, Filippino Lippi, the son of his old master, and Jacopo di Sellajo, who, though not a pupil, was a servile follower of Botticelli, and had been his fellow-student in Fra Filippo's workshop.

The task of connecting the school-pictures with their probable authors has yet to be undertaken. It would be a work of immense interest, calling for all the discriminative insight and constructive power which Mr. Berenson has displayed in his identification of the *Amico di Sandro*. Whoever may undertake it will assuredly not overlook the possible achievements of Mariano, Sandro's nephew, who we know was living with his uncle in 1498, and whose training, we may well believe, would have been a special object of the Master's care.

Before closing this summary account, two pictures must be noticed. In Mr. Brocklebank's collection at Heswall is a *Madonna and Child*, attributed to Botticelli. It is known to me only in reproductions, but it seems to be a very charming little picture, although its exact place in Botticellian art is somewhat difficult to determine.

The *Derelitta*, belonging to Prince Pallavicini in Rome, is another debatable picture. Before the closed *cancelli*, or gateway, of an Early Renaissance palace sits a desolate, barefooted little figure with her face buried in her hands. She is clad only in a loose white vest, and her mantle and overgarments lie strewn on the stone steps beside her. The scene is rendered with deep



[Brocklebank Gallery, Herxwall]

THE MADONNA AND CHILD

pathos, but also with a simplicity and directness of appeal which is hardly in accordance with Botticelli's usual manner. The picture is claimed for him by some of his critics, while others still doubt whether it shows sufficiently characteristic traits to warrant the attribution.

Although few painters have had—in one sense—so large a following as Botticelli, his influence upon the development of Italian Art was considerably less than that of many inferior painters, and was not commensurate either with the number of his pupils or the magnitude of his genius. The qualities which we now most value in his art—his unique rendering of movement and his creative handling of line—seem to have hardly been appreciated by his contemporaries and were neglected by his imitators, who for the most part contented themselves with reproducing certain peculiarities in his sentiment and style. His drooping Madonnas and disconsolate Angels, his elaborate draperies and lavish use of flowers and ornaments, are repeated again and again through a mass of school-work; but I know of no work of his school which betrays even an attempt to emulate the most distinctive excellencies of his art. His own artistic development had been *against*, rather than *with*, the general current of contemporary painting, and his influence—on all those points where his genius should have prevailed—was swept away in the strong tide of *Seicentismo* which the achievements of Raphael and Michael Angelo contributed so powerfully to swell. Though surrounded by a crowd of pupils and imitators who perpetuated and often exaggerated his mannerisms, and in some cases developed them according to the

style of the Seicento, yet in all that constitutes his chief title to fame Botticelli stands strangely alone, on an isolated pedestal which none attempted to scale; and in the greatest achievements of his art he is not •only without a rival, but without a follower.

CATALOGUE OF THE WORKS OF BOTTICELLI

Arranged according to the Galleries in which they are contained

BRITISH ISLES.

LONDON.—NATIONAL GALLERY.

No. 592. ADORATION OF THE MAGI. Tempera. Wood panel, measures 1 ft. 8 in. × 4 ft. 7 in.

Ascribed in the catalogue to Filippino Lippi.

No. 626. PORTRAIT OF A YOUNG MAN. Tempera. Wood panel, measures 1 ft. 2 in. × 11 in.

No. 915. "MARS AND VENUS." Tempera. Wood panel, measures 2 ft. 3½ in. × 5 ft. 8 in.

No. 1033. ADORATION OF THE MAGI. Tempera. Wood panel. *Tondo*, measuring 4 ft. 3½ in. in diameter.

Ascribed in the catalogue to Filippino Lippi.

No. 1034. NATIVITY. Tempera on canvas. Measures 3 ft. 6½ in. × 2 ft. 5½ in.

LONDON.—MR. J. P. HESELTINE.

MADONNA AND CHILD WITH ST. JOHN. Tempera on wood. Measures 1 ft. 5½ in. × 1 ft. 2 in.

Considered by Mr. Berenson to have been painted in part by Botticelli.

LONDON.—MR. LUDWIG MOND'S COLLECTION.

SCENES FROM THE LIFE OF S. ZANOBI. (Two panels.)
Tempera on wood. Long panels.

FRANCE.

PARIS.—LOUVRE.

No. 1297. GIOVANNA TORNABUONI WITH VENUS AND THE
THREE GRACES. Fresco from the Villa Lemmi. Measures
7 ft. $\frac{1}{2}$ in. $\times$ 9 ft. 2 in.

No. 1298. LORENZO TORNABUONI WITH THE LIBERAL ARTS.
Fresco from the Villa Lemmi. Measures 7 ft. $5\frac{3}{4}$ in.
 $\times$ 8 ft. $8\frac{3}{4}$ in.

GERMANY.

BERLIN.—ROYAL MUSEUM.

No. 106. MADONNA AND CHILD WITH SAINTS (known as the
"Bardi Madonna"). Tempera on wood. Measures 6 ft.
2 in. $\times$ 6 ft.

No. 1128. ST. SEBASTIAN. Tempera on wood. Measures
6 ft. 6 in. $\times$ 2 ft. 6 in.

DRESDEN.

No. 12. SCENES FROM THE LIFE OF S. ZANOBI. Tempera.
Long wood panel.

MUNICH.—KGL. ALTES PINAKOTHEK.

No. 1010. PIETÀ. Tempera on wood. Measures 4 ft. 6 in.
 $\times$ 6 ft. 11 in.

Painted in part by Botticelli.

ITALY.

BERGAMO.

STORY OF VIRGINIA. Tempera on wood, 2 ft. 8 in. × 5 ft. 6 in.

FLORENCE.—ACADEMY.

No. 73. CORONATION. Tempera on wood. Measures 12 ft. 4 in. × 8 ft. 1 in.

No. 74. PREDELLA to above, representing, in the centre, the *Annunciation*; on the left, scenes from the lives of St. John Evangelist and St. Augustine; on the right, scenes from the lives of St. Jerome and St. Elizius. Tempera on wood. Measures 7 in. × 8 ft. 10 in.

No. 80. PRIMAVERA (SPRING). Tempera on wood. Measures 7 ft. 8 in. × 10 ft. 1 in.

No. 85. MADONNA, ANGELS AND SAINTS (known as "Maddonna of S. Barnaba"). Tempera on wood. Measures 10 ft. 10 in. × 9 ft.

Nos. 157, 158, 161, 162. Four panels, which probably formed *Predella* to above.

No. 157. CHRIST RISING FROM THE SEPULCHRE. 8 in. × 1 ft. 3 in.

No. 158. ST. AMBROSE DEAD. 8 in. × 1 ft. 2 in.

No. 161. SALOME WITH THE HEAD OF THE BAPTIST. 8 in. × 1 ft. 3 in.

No. 162. VISION OF ST. AUGUSTINE. 8 in. × 1 ft. 2 in.

FLORENCE.—UFFIZI GALLERY.

No. 39. BIRTH OF VENUS. Tempera on canvas. Measures 5 ft. 8 in. × 9 ft. 1 in.

No. 1154. PORTRAIT OF GIOVANNI DI COSIMO DEI MEDICI.
Tempera on wood. Measures 1 ft. 9 in. $\times$ 1 ft. 2 in.

No. 1156. RETURN OF JUDITH. Tempera on wood. Measures 10 in. $\times$ 8 in.

No. 1158. HOLOFERNES' DEAD BODY IN HIS TENT. Tempera on wood. Measures 10 in. $\times$ 8 in.

No. 1179. ST. AUGUSTINE IN HIS STUDY. Tempera on wood. Measures 1 ft. 3 in. $\times$ 10 in.

No. 1182. CALUMNY. Tempera on wood. Measures 2 ft. $\times$ 3 ft.

No. 1267 *bis*. MADONNA OF THE MAGNIFICAT. Tempera on wood. *Tondo*, measuring 3 ft. 8 in. in diameter.

No. 1286. ADORATION OF THE MAGI. Tempera on wood. Measures 3 ft. 8 in. $\times$ 4 ft. 6 in.

No. 1289. MADONNA OF THE MELAGRANA. Tempera on wood. *Tondo*, measuring 4 ft. 8 in. in diameter.

No. 1299. FORTEZZA. Tempera on wood. Measures 5 ft. 4 in. $\times$ 2 ft. 10 in.

No. 1303. MADONNA OF THE ROSEBUSH. Tempera on wood. Measures 4 ft. $\times$ 2 ft.

Probably an early work of Botticelli's.

No. 1316. ANNUNCIATION.* Tempera on wood. Measures 4 ft. 10 in. $\times$ 5 ft. 1 in.

Painted in part by Botticelli.

No. 3436. ADORATION OF THE MAGI. Tempera on wood. Measures 3 ft. 5½ in. $\times$ 5 ft. 7 in.

"Laid in" by Botticelli; painted at some later date by a sixteenth-century artist, and not entirely finished. In very bad preservation

STA. MARIA NUOVA MADONNA. Tempera on wood. Measures 2 ft. 10 in. $\times$ 2 ft.

A picture that may, with some probability, be considered an early effort of Botticelli's.

FLORENCE.—PALAZZO PITTI (ROYAL APARTMENTS).

PALLAS WITH A CENTAUR. Tempera on canvas. Measures 7 ft. 10 in. $\times$ 4 ft. 10 in.

FLORENCE.—PALAZZO CAPPONI.

COMMUNION OF ST. JEROME.

FLORENCE.—CHURCH OF THE OGNISSANTI.

ST. AUGUSTINE. Fresco. Measures 5 ft. $\times$ 3 ft. 8 in.

MILAN.—POLDI-PEZZOLI COLLECTION.

No. 156. MADONNA AND CHILD. Tempera on wood. Measures 1 ft. 8 in. $\times$ 1 ft. 3 in.

MILAN.—AMBROSIANA.

MADONNA AND CHILD WITH ANGELS. Tempera on wood.
Tondo, measuring 2 ft. 3 in. in diameter.

ROME.—SISTINE CHAPEL IN THE VATICAN.

TEMPTATION OF CHRIST—SCENES FROM THE LIFE OF
MOSES—PUNISHMENT OF CORE. Frescoes.

SEVERAL PORTRAITS OF EARLY POPES. FRESCOS.

RUSSIA.

ST. PETERSBURG.—HERMITAGE GALLERY.

No. 163. ADORATION OF THE MAGI. Tempera on wood.

UNITED STATES.

BOSTON.—MRS. J. L. GARDNER'S COLLECTION.

MADONNA AND CHILD WITH ANGEL, known as the "Chigi Madonna." Tempera. Painted on wood.

DEATH OF LUCRETIA. Tempera. Wood panel.

CATALOGUE OF SOME OF THE
MORE IMPORTANT WORKS OF
BOTTICELLI'S SCHOOL AND
FOLLOWERS¹

AUSTRIA.

VIENNA.—THE ACADEMY.

MADONNA AND CHILD WITH TWO ANGELS. Tempera on wood. *Tondo*, measuring 3 ft. 9 in. in diameter.

·Inferior school work.

BRITISH ISLES.

LONDON.—NATIONAL GALLERY.

No. 226. MADONNA AND CHILD WITH ST. JOHN AND ANGELS. Tempera on wood. *Tondo*, measuring 3 ft. 8½ in. in diameter.

A charming work, painted probably in Botticelli's *bottega* and under his supervision, with possibly some assistance from him. In the catalogue it is ascribed only to the "Florentine School, XV Century."

No. 275. MADONNA AND CHILD WITH ST. JOHN AND AN ANGEL. Tempera on wood. *Tondo* measuring 2 ft. 9 in. in diameter.

The work of a scholar, or follower. On the back is inscribed the name of the architect, Giuliano da S. Gallo.

¹ Those works, once tentatively ascribed to Botticelli, which Mr. Berenson now claims for "l'Amico di Sandro," have been omitted from this list.

NO. 782. MADONNA AND CHILD. Tempera on wood.
Measures 2 ft. 9 in. $\times$ 2 ft. 1½ in.

Much restored. The work of a follower. It bears some resemblance to the *Madonna and Child with St. John* in the Louvre (No. 1296)

NO. 916. VENUS WITH AMORINI. Tempera on wood.
Measures 3 ft. ½ in. $\times$ 5 ft. 8 in.

Considered by Mrs. Berenson to be by Jacopo di Sellaio.

LONDON.—MR. EDMUND DAVIS'S COLLECTION.

MADONNA AND CHILD WITH ST. JOHN BAPTIST.

LONDON.—LORD ELCHO'S COLLECTION.

MADONNA AND CHILD WITH BACKGROUND OF ROSES.

LONDON.—LORD ROSEBERY'S COLLECTION.

THE SEASONS. Tempera on wood. Measures 2 ft. 7 in.
 $\times$ 9½ in.

School work.

LONDON.—LORD WEMYSS'S COLLECTION.

MADONNA ADORING THE DIVINE INFANT. Tempera on canvas.

Probably a school work, but considered by Ulmann to be by Botticelli.

CHESTER, HESWALL (NEAR).—MR. T. BROCKLEBANK'S COLLECTION.

NO. 196. MADONNA AND CHILD. Tempera on wood.
Measures 2 ft. 1½ in. $\times$ 1 ft. 3 in.

As I have not seen this picture I am compelled to place it in this catalogue. It seems difficult to locate it. It is probably a very early work.

FRANCE.

PARIS.—LOUVRE.

No. 1295. MAGNIFICAT. Tempera on wood. *Tondo* measuring 3 ft. 9 in. in diameter.

An inferior copy of Botticelli's picture.

No. 1296. MADONNA AND CHILD WITH ST. JOHN. Tempera on wood. Measures 3 ft. 1 in. × 2 ft. 3 in.

Painted by some very good artist influenced by Botticelli.

No. 1299. VENUS WITH AMORINI. Tempera on wood. Measures 2 ft. 10 in. × 7 ft. 4 in.

Ascribed by Mrs. Berenson to Jacopo di Sellajo.

PARIS.—COMTE DE BAUDREUIL'S COLLECTION.

TAPESTRY WITH A PALLAS.

Executed probably from a drawing by Botticelli.

CHANTILLY.—DUC D'AUMALE'S COLLECTION.

ALLEGORY OF FRUITFULNESS.

A fine school work inspired in part by Botticelli's drawing (*Abundance*) in the British Museum.

MADONNA AND CHILD WITH ANGEL.

LYONS.

Four *cassone* panels, representing scenes from Boccaccio's "Story of Nastagio degli Onesti."

Accepted by Morelli as Botticelli's work, but generally considered to have been executed in his *bottega* under his supervision.

GERMANY.

BERLIN NATIONAL GALLERY.—RACZYNSKI COLLECTION.

MADONNA AND CHILD WITH EIGHT ANGELS. Tempera on wood. *Tondo*, measuring 4 ft. 6 in. in diameter.

An inferior school work; probably painted by Biagio Tucci as a (free) copy of Botticelli's *Melagrana tondo*.

BERLIN.—ROYAL MUSEUM.

MADONNA AND CHILD WITH SEVEN ANGELS. Tempera on wood. *Tondo*, measuring 6 ft. 4 in. in diameter.

A *bottega* work executed in all likelihood from a sketch by Botticelli.

NO. 1124. VENUS. Tempera on canvas. Measures 5 ft. 2 in. × 2 ft. 3 in.

Copied by some follower from *The Birth of Venus*.

DRESDEN.—THE GALLERY.

NO. 8. MADONNA AND CHILD WITH ST. JOHN BAPTIST. Tempera on wood. 2 ft. 11 in. × 2 ft. 5 in.

An inferior work of perhaps the same artist who painted No. 782 (National Gallery) and No. 1296 (Louvre).

ITALY.

BERGAMO.—MORELLI COLLECTION (BEQUEATHED TO PUBLIC GALLERY).

SALVATOR MUNDI. Tempera on wood. Measures 1 ft. 6 in. × 1 ft. 1 in.

Inferior school work. Believed by Morelli to be by Botticelli.

FLORENCE.—ACADEMY.

NO. 88. MADONNA AND CHILD WITH SS. COSMO AND DAMIAN. Tempera on wood. Measures 5 ft. 7 in. × 6 ft. 5 in.

By some artist influenced by Botticelli. Very considerably restored, and in part seems to have been repainted in oil.

FLORENCE.—PITTI GALLERY.

NO. 357. MADONNA AND CHILD WITH ST. JOHN. Tempera on canvas. Measures 4 ft. 5 in. × 3 ft.

By some follower who exaggerated Botticelli's style and feeling.

FLORENCE.—PALAZZO PITTI (ROYAL APARTMENTS).

MADONNA OF THE ROSES. Tempera on wood. *Tondo*, measuring 3 ft. 8½ in. diameter.

Probably executed in Botticelli's *bottega* under his personal supervision, with, perhaps, some assistance from him.

Subsequently repainted, in parts, in oil. Discovered in 1900.

FLORENCE.—PALAZZO CORSINI.

NO. 167. MADONNA AND CHILD WITH ANGELS. Tempera on wood. *Tondo*, measuring 4 ft. 10 in. in diameter.

Inferior school work.

MADONNA AND CHILD. Tempera on wood. Measures 2 ft. 5 in. × 1 ft. 10 in.

School work, but considered by Ulmann and Steinmann to be an early work by Botticelli.

MILAN.—POLDI PEZZOLI MUSEUM.

NO. 552. PIETÀ. Tempera on wood. Measures 3 ft. 6 in.
× 2 ft. 4 in.

The work of an imitator.

ROME.—BORGHESE VILLA.

MADONNA AND CHILD WITH ST. JOHN AND SIX ANGELS.
Tempera on wood. *Tondo*, measuring 5 ft. 8 in. in
diameter.

By some follower who exaggerated Botticelli's style
and feeling.

ROME.—PALAZZO PALLAVICINI.

THE OUTCAST (*Derelitta*).

A very interesting picture, considered by some authorities to be by Botticelli.

PIACENZA.—BIBLIOTECA.

MADONNA AND CHILD WITH ST. JOHN AND BACKGROUND
OF ROSES. Tempera on canvas applied to wood. *Tondo*,
measuring 3 ft. diameter.

Discovered 1902. Resembles the *Madonna of the
Roses*, and the "St. John" in Mr. Heseltine's picture.

TURIN.—GALLERY.

MADONNA AND CHILD WITH ST. JOHN AND AN ANGEL.
Tempera on wood. *Tondo*, measuring 4 ft. in diameter.

Probably the work of a follower. Considered by
Ulmann to be by Botticelli.

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